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# BRILLA

ANNA·M·DOLING

1. Fiction, American.

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**BRILLA**



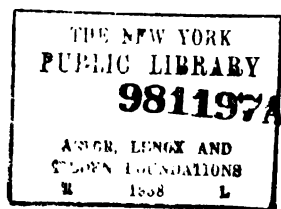
# BRILLA

BY  
ANNA M. DOLING



NEW YORK  
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

1913  
mcs



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A tall, straight, keen-eyed elderly man, whose carriage denoted military training, was the speaker.

“Your father is not living?” inquired a young man who stood beside a mountain buck-board that contained fishing tackle and some light luggage.

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"I'll warrant you these same hills have been the scene of some wild doings? "

The Captain answered with quick gruffness: "Well, suh, we've nevah burned any witches out heah yet. We've had our rough pioneah days, 'tis true; but ouhs was no worse than othah sections. No worse than othahs, suh."

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"You must be, Captain. I have met many fine people on the road."

The younger man smiled as he spoke. The older one, interpreting the smile as an indication that the stranger was patronizing him, replied hastily:

"Oh, we have plenty of real country folk heah-about, suh. You of the busy, bustling, conventional world would recognize them only as 'Hill Billies' and 'Hey, Rubes,' perhaps; but I know them as genuine friends, good neightahs, and splendid citizens. And the jay-birds don't build nests in ouh whiskahs altogethah, suh. We have some educated people in ouh community."

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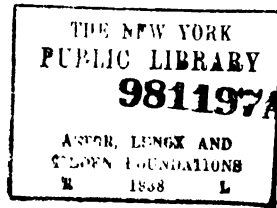
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The younger man gave an expressive shrug. "Well, he will be qualified all right if he's bright enough to uphold the dignity of the law with one hand while he pulls in the shekels with the other."

"That's a strange statement to make, young fellah." The Southerner's keen eyes glowed with a peculiar light. "Do you mean to say a man elected by us would have a price, suh?"

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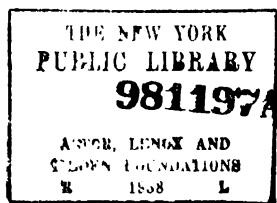
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"You ah unknown to me, suh. I dislike to appeah uncivil and discohteous to a strangah within ouh gates, but just the same you ah a liah, suh. That may be the attitude of those who chafe in the guilt of youh corroded cities, but ouhs is an uncorrupted community heah, suh. In insulting the honor of the gentleman I refuh to, you have insulted me. If I was a youngah man I'd give you the choice of weapons, suh."

The stranger drew back a step, abashed by the anger he had so suddenly aroused. Then he attempted to make his peace with the old man.

"Captain Barker,—now truly,—I beg pardon and —"

"Nevah mind, suh. I am a Kaintuckian by birth, a Missourian by choice; and loyalty to friends is ouh password. Just ride on; I refuse to accompany you fahthah, suh."

"Captain, you surely would not let an idle remark —"

"Drive on. I refuse speech with you. Drive on, I say, suh."

The old soldier held himself as upright as the reviewing officer of a regiment on dress parade. The offender, seeing that further argument would be useless, sprang into his wagon and started on. Once he looked around. The peppery Captain was cantering back at a brisk pace over the road he had just traveled. The young man lost sight of him beyond the ridge as the sound of approaching wheels caught his ear.

## CHAPTER II

**A**LOW, heavy-wheeled phaeton, rather the worse for wear and drawn by a piebald pony came into view. Its occupants were a girl and a dog. The girl's white sunbonnet, fastened loosely under her chin, had slipped partly off; and, dangling, it swayed carelessly with every move of her head. A small black-and-white fox-terrier lay snugly asleep upon the seat.

With roadside courtesy, the girl began to turn slightly to one side in passing the uncovered buck-board; but she checked her horse short when the man lifted his hat and said:

"I'm unacquainted in your hills. Can you tell me how far I shall have to drive to get lodging for the night?"

"I am rathah afraid you will have to pass on to the second or third house," she said. "The first one is the Widow Wait's, and I'm quite suah she is not prepared to keep you. The Averys or the Walkahs might, suh."

"Great Scott," thought the man, "does every one here in the hills annihilate his 'r's'?" But he said aloud: "I thank you. I traveled a bit along the road awhile ago with a distinguished-



looking old soldier that had one leg missing. I was about to get my bearings from him, but I unthinkingly insulted his old-fashioned code of honor. He grew very gingery about it and proceeded to court-martial me then and there. In fact, he very savagely ordered me to drive on."

A peal of laughter broke from the girl's lips and her shoulders shook with uncontrolled mirth. Her bonnet slipped off entirely, disclosing a delicate prettiness that at first glance might have been mistaken for frailty. Closer observation, however, revealed a brightness of eye and a clearness of skin, with a rising wild-rose flush, that gave every sign of the health and the strength that comes from out-of-door living.

"Why, suh, that was my Uncle Bawkah. We live ovah theah," with a sweep of a gracefully rounded hand and arm, "just across the range between heah and Bawkahsville. My name is Brilla Bawkah. I teach the school in Dogwood Valley."

The man bowed low. "I'm glad to meet you, Miss Barker. My name is Pike Hamilton. I'm out from New York and into your hills on a little vacation."

"I am much afraid you will find us a mighty unpolished, wild sort out heah, Mr. Hamilton Uncle, I know, has already given you not a very nice sample of ouh mannaahs." An apologetic note crept into her soft voice.

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Barker. Nothing

matters, provided I get shelter for myself and food for my animal."

"Truly, suh, I wish you and my kin had not disputed. We might have kept you, but now,—oh, deah—" The girl shook her head in emphasis of the imprudence of proffering hospitality.

"That is most kind of you, and I understand," Hamilton answered. "The fault was all mine. I intend to see the Captain to-morrow and apologize."

"Oh, I don't know about youah being all to blame. You see I've lived always with my uncle. He is very odd about some things, but he fohgives quite grandly when his angah passes. I myself often vex him purposely, just for an opportunity to apologize and to see and heah him fohgive me. Sometimes he even rants a bit because my haiah and eyes ah not of the dawk, beautiful Kaintucky type."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, indeed. He loves dawk-eyed women best because his wife, who died many yeahs ago, was a famous Southern black-eyed beauty. He nevah has fohgiven his brothah,—my fathah, you know,—for choosing a faiah-haiahed, blue-eyed girl."

"You don't tell me?"

"Yes. I love to tease him, and I sometimes reply in the words of that wise gray owl, a quotation from my old Third Readah."

"How is that, Miss Barker?"

"'To-whit —— to-who ——' an old owl cried,  
From the belfry in the town;  
'Glad-hearted lassies need not mind  
If locks be gold, black, brown,  
They silver soon — so fast — so fast —  
The sands of life run down.'"

The man looked his astonishment. For lack of something better to say, he asked, "Do your father and mother live here?"

The girl turned her face away swiftly. The man could have punctured his tongue later for the question.

"My mothah died twenty-two yeahs ago when I was bohn. My fathah — we — we nevah speak of my fathah, suh."

Twenty-two years ago. And the young woman seemed not a day over eighteen to the man from the outer world.

"With all due respect to your kinsman's taste, Miss Barker, history gives us many wonderful women with flaxen hair and eyes of blue."

Brilla Barker looked up at him, her own violet eyes wide open. Her long lashes fell lower against her smooth cheek, and her mouth, a bow of perfect innocence, was tightly drawn; then it roguishly relaxed and she laughed again and again quite gayly.

"Excuse me, please, and don't believe me crazy, but I just can't help it when I think of how my Uncle Bawkah must have suhprised you."

The man, smiling back at her, observed her clear-cut profile, red lips, and braid of heavy hair.

Beautiful soft crinkly hair it was, now golden brown, now like overripe wheat, changing color as the sunlight flashed upon it. He was thinking of her beauty when she continued:

"Please don't mind an old man, Mr. Hamilton, who is just a deah touchy old rebel. You would nevah daah to call him one, though. He'd eat you up."

"My dear young lady," he said, "you may be sure I am not anxious to take the risk, since he very nearly challenged me to a duel a while ago."

Brilla gathered up the slackened reins. "I must be going. Just follow the road, suh. The first house is the Widow Wait's, then comes Avery's, and then Walkah's. I'd advise you to pehsuade the Averys to keep you. They have a candy-breaking pahty on at Walkah's to-night."

"Will you be there?"

Looking straight ahead, she replied shortly: "I don't think so. . . . You can get some place to stay to-night. We nevah refuse a strangah unless he gets smaht. If you should have any trouble just say Captain Bawkah directed you."

"That is more than kind. I trust we may meet again."

"Folks usually do in the hills," coolly answered the girl. "We ah a mighty small, plain world out heah. Get up, Pokey."

The calico pony trotted on. Catching a reproof in the last words, the stranger stood admonishing himself for his boldness.

"By Jove, she's a beauty, that girl! Too bad I asked about the family, since the father seems to be some sort of a black sheep. Gee — but these ridges are full of surprises. I'd like to meet the prospective congressman. I suppose he'll turn out to be another."

Hamilton started on his way over the road that Brilla had just left. A hundred yards farther on some compelling influence caused him to turn in his seat. Out of the back of the rickety phaeton a pair of violet eyes were looking full into his over a slim shoulder.

He lifted his hat. She waved her whip; then, touching the mottled pony into a quicker gait, she was soon lost to sight behind the low hill that had been crossed so short a time before by her soldierly kinsman.

### CHAPTER III

**T**HE stillness of that same late spring afternoon hung over the village of Barkersville. The valley and its early cornfields were richly flooded with a mellow burnished light, but the golden fringe was growing shorter as the shadows lengthened. In the distance a soft gossamer mist, fine as the lace mantle of a bride, draped itself like a marriage veil, half revealing, half concealing, the distant river that lay coiled around the feet of the old brown bluffs like some long sinuous silver-and-emerald serpent taking its ease.

Not so many years before this time the Delaware and the Osage Indians had paddled their light canoes up and down the beautiful stream; and one had but to stoop here and there in the by-paths beneath the grim boulders in order to gather handfuls of arrowheads, silent reminders of the red men that long ago had gone to happier hunting-grounds.

A faint tintinnabulation here and there told of drowsy sheep and cattle taking an afternoon siesta near the water's edge. A bob-white piped his saucy call from the low shelter of a buckberry bush,—undaunted by a haughty hawk “bird’s-eye-

ing" for future marauding points high up above the ridges.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of the village square a loud-tongued timepiece struck half past three.

Judge Robert Barton sat at his desk in a roomy office over the "City Drug Store." The "city" in this case was merely a misnomer bestowed by the village pharmacist in an outburst of civic pride, a result of his election to the presidency of the Barkersville Board of Commerce.

Robert Barton was gathering the dust of his forty-third life mile, and a patch of iron-gray beside each temple gave him a distinguished appearance. His splendidly proportioned body was comfortably adjusted in a large hickory chair that he had tilted back. The "statoots" of Missouri, reduced from their dignity of upholding the mighty arm of the law, were serving in the more plebeian capacity of prop for the Judge's two large feet under an old-fashioned walnut desk.

The other occupant of the room was a slim, wiry man of about the Judge's age,—swarthy, with beady, restless eyes, sharp features, and an aquiline nose.

Humwell Gilton was his name. He was by far the most prosperous person in the community, but, with the exception of a few followers of bad reputation, his friends had decreased as his holdings had increased.

He had come to consult the Judge about an

old deed. When the business was finished he lingered to talk politics, despite the fact that the Judge showed plainly that he could scarcely treat him with the toleration due him as a client.

"Jedge," he said, "thar's quite a peart lot o' talk now 'bout havin' Jules Marzelle cut the mustard for congriss in spite o' his age. Have ye heered it?"

"I have no wish to see Jules enter any sort of political race," the Judge replied dryly.

"Joe Oden says it's allers ben a kinder quare sort o' mystery whar the money kum from for thet boy's eddikation."

The Judge glanced sharply at the speaker, then turned away to gaze meditatively out of the window,—out to where the impurpling blue of the sky line lost itself in the sage green of the hills in a blending so delicate that it was impossible to tell where the sky line ended and the mountain line began.

"Joe Oden will learn, perhaps, before Dame Nature homesteads for him a final six feet of earth,—the only holding he will ever acquire in the Ozarks or anywhere else,—that Life is largely a matter of mystery since the birth of Time."

"Wal, Joe 'lows as how he has allus heered that nobuddy ever gotta chance to find hit out in all of these hyar years. Huh?"

"I never heard that any one tried to find out," the Judge answered; "but I have always known where the money came from."



"You? Why, Joe says nary a dod-busted man—"

"I don't give a damn," the Judge replied hotly, "what a he-goat of the hills like Joe Oden or any one else says. I say I know where the money came from. It was neither borrowed, begged, nor stolen."

"Wal, I allus 'lowed that if any one roun' hyar was onter hit, you war, Jedge. But folks will sorter talk."

Robert Barton looked the other straight in the eyes. "Jules Marzelle has my warmest friendship, his mother has my profound respect, and if it will make it stronger you may understand this,—I intend to stand by them both, if they need me, until hell turns to a snowdrift and the devil's an icicle."

"Hold on thar, Jedge; ain't thet a-puttin' of hit purty stout, huh?"

"I meant to put it stout." Barton turned to his client a determined face, with jaws close set.

"Say, Jedge, tell me thet air story. I never did jest sense hit. How does a feller 'thout ary name like Jules Marzelle come to stand so well in this hyar hill country that he ken run for congress? Huh?"

"By eternity," the Judge answered, frowning and shrugging his broad shoulders, "if there's any glory in it, Jules Marzelle is entitled to it. For my part, I would just as soon see him turn

horsethief as to have the tentacles of politics, the devil-fish, fasten upon him. Time was when Patriotism and Honor was the slogan for those who walked in the high places, but nowadays every other son of them must needs have his dirty price. I repeat, I have no wish to see Jules enter any sort of political race." The Judge went on speaking to himself rather than to his smirking auditor. "Yes, to-day we see power bestowed by the people used against that very people for private gain. There is bound to come such a moral awakening one day —"

"Hain't thet the truth. Say, Jedge, tell me thet air story; won't you, huh?"

The dark man's eyes were like those of a ferret as he stirred, restlessly crossing and uncrossing his slim legs.

"You have been in this community a long time. Surely you have heard it before now," retorted the Judge, impatiently.

"In part, Jedge; only in part. You know I war erway pritty nigh a year jest erbout the time hit all happened," said Gilton in a half wheedling tone.

"I have no wish to resurrect a skeleton of more than twenty years for you or any one else, Gilton. Horses of fire couldn't drag it from me now; do you understand?"

"Joe says —"

"Yes, you have been listening to the devil knows what of Joe Oden's drivels, and Joe Oden could

qualify as an expert when it comes to the art of lying. For that very reason it will do no harm, I suppose, to tell you the truth."

Robert Barton closed his eyes as if weary. He was debating whether it would be better to tell this creature the truth or let him believe the lies that had evidently been told to him.

"I'd shore like to hear it, Jedge. I shore would."

The troubled voice of a mourning dove floating in on the breeze was the only sound heard. To the big man at the desk it seemed as if the whole world awaited his words; yet he could hardly bear to break the silence. A half-smothered sigh escaped his lips. He opened his eyes; their clear gray depths were darkly somber and his broad brow was heavily care-lined.

"Will you tell me the story now, Jedge?"

"Yes, you shall hear the truth instead of Joe Oden's lies."

"Wal, I'd shore like to for onct, Jedge."

"A young Frenchman named Jules Marzelle came here in the spring of 18—. He had been educated in this country and had taken a course in medicine. Altogether he was much too brilliant for a rural community like this.

"He had been here about ten days perhaps when his medical knowledge was needed.

"We had no physician nearer than thirty-five miles away. Our best citizens, recognizing our need and quick to discern the young man's ability,

urged him to set up an office. He refused, saying that he had no regular license and that he was just knocking about a bit before returning to his old home across the sea.

"However, we continued to urge the young doctor to stay among us, and finally he yielded. With a few instruments and some medical books a neat office was set up in this building."

"He got a right peart run o' practice from the start, didn't he?"

"A more careful, conscientious doctor a community never had."

"How old did you say he war?"

"He was a little older than I was; and I was just twenty-one. Naturally we became great friends and comrades. Dr. Marzelle was kept very busy, but he was never too tired to make a call, even if it came from an adjoining county at midnight when the roads were rough and the weather trying."

"I've heern ole Fisherman Billy,—you 'member him, Jedge, thet used to say he'd ruther fish than own a railroad,—say thet the Doc tuk his life in his hands onct, an' his medicine case 'twixt his teeth, an' swum Devil Crik a-ragin' when Ike Likes war a kid an' a-chokin' to death with the membrany croup."

"Yes, that is the truth. There should be more than one man among us here in the Knobs to revere the memory of Dr. Marzelle."

The speaker had broken the thread of his story

and sat silently looking out into the shimmering sunlight away over the crest of Wildcat Hill. His face shone with tender reverence,— the reverence of a man bound by memory's chain to the smiles and the tears of yesteryears.

The lean brown auditor shuffled uneasily and was about to speak when the Judge resumed:

"Where was I? Oh, yes; about Gabe Hudson. He was one of Dr. Marzelle's patients over on Mink Creek. It was the tiny love-god loitering along the bank of that same creek one rare day in June that changed the face of the world for my friend. Hudson had the one case of asthma in this section of the country and the doctor was interested in him. He was also interested, naturally, in the only other member of Gabe's family, — a young daughter, barely sixteen, who was the prettiest, neatest, and best-schooled lass hereabout. Gabe had been an idler, a rolling stone, and a ne'er-do-well, but undeniably a scholar; and he had taught his motherless girl to read, write, and speak quite correctly.

"The majority of the settlers about here were from the South. Gabe's daughter had inherited from her Tennessean mother all the grace and the beauty peculiar to a woman of good Southern lineage. The cream of the magnolia was in Hallie Hudson's brow and throat, the tint of the wild cinnamon-rose was in her cheeks; her dark hair and serious eyes were the color of a brown chinkapin."

"Look 'e hyar, Jedge, that sounds like you war turrible gone on thet air gal yo'self. 'Fess up now; wa'n't you?"

Robert Barton was sternly silent. A tiny mouse, deluded by the deep quiet, crept half-way across the room. The only sound heard was the ticking of the office clock which seemed to mock with a never-never, never-never.

"Whut happened ar'ter the doc cut out the lawyer, Jedge? Huh?"

The question, ringing harshly upon the stillness, remained unanswered, falling apparently upon unheeding ears and an unbroken reverie.

"You hev jest erbout forgot you war a-talkin', hain't you, Jedge?"

"No, I had not forgotten. I was speaking of the Doctor's visits to Hudson's. These calls over on the Mink grew more frequent until just about a year after he came among us. Returning from there one fearfully dark night, when the river and every creek in the country were swollen out of their banks by weeks of heavy rains, the Doctor struck a little too far below that dangerous crossing on Big Belle. He had learned to know all the low fords and could swim fairly well, but in some way the deep current caught him when he had both feet in his stirrups and he was drawn into one of those treacherous suck-holes. With the faithful dumb brute that had shared his hunger and fatigue upon many an errand of mercy, he battled out there in the dark with Death, and went into

the Eternal Beyond, with a kiss from Love's shrine still fresh upon his boyish lips."

The big man cleared his throat a time or two, and a nature overflowing with pity and brotherly love was revealed in the depths of his grave, sad eyes.

"Thet hain't all of the story, Jedge?"

"To this day," continued the Judge, without answering Gilton, "I never think of that bright, handsome comrade and friend out there alone in the dark so far from the hills of his sunny France but it brings a lump to my throat. Ah, well."

"The gal, Jedge?" Gilton leaned eagerly forward. "What did the gal do? Huh?"

"With face like a marble statue and with tearless, starry eyes, Hallie Hudson attended the funeral. I was selected to take charge of the burial and of the Doctor's affairs. I sent to the city for a clergyman of the boy's faith. I knew that this would be his wish, as he once told me with pride of a near relative of his who was a dignitary high in the church world across the sea. The coming of a strange man of God in robe and surplice into a churchless community, as we were then, created a nine days' wonder. It was but a straw in the stack, however, to the surprise of four months later."

"What was thet, Jedge Barton? Didn't the gal —"

The cloud that crossed the face of Bob Barton

checked the sentence, and Hum Gilton's eyes sought the floor.

"Among Dr. Marzelle's papers I found his parents' address. I wrote telling them the sad news. A reply came, saying that the father would be over as soon as possible to visit the son's grave and to learn the further particulars of his death. Monsieur Henri Napoleon Marzelle did arrive four months later."

"What was thet, Jedge Barton? What did he do?" The dark-skinned man shot a quick glance at the big lawyer who had unconsciously covered his eyes with his hand.

"Just a few days prior to the gentleman's arrival another stranger put in an appearance. A son was born to her who had been Hallie Hudson. The child's father was the young physician, who had secretly married the girl ten months before at a village on the edge of Delaware County. Things were done in a very haphazard way here in those days, and the girl could show no marriage certificate. The baby boy was given the father's name, however,—Jules Napoleon Marzelle."

"By dawggies, I bet thet old Frenchman war rambungshus, wa'n't he? Give the gal thunder and greased lightnin'; didn't he, Jedge? Huh?" The questioner's face wore an ugly leer.

"He did not. Monsieur Marzelle believed in the young mother. He was a man of education, an accomplished linguist. He could speak English well, and had the story from the young mother's



own lips. He set about immediately toward legalizing the child's parentage in order that he might have a standing in the French courts for an inheritance. Upon me as a lawyer was placed what I thought would be an easy task,— proving the marriage valid. But, as I said before, things were carelessly done here in the hills years ago, and to my great pain and surprise no record of a marriage could be found nor any person who had performed the ceremony. There had been but one witness, so Hallie said, a man unknown to her, as was the squire also. This stranger happened to be in the office at the time, but had the earth opened and swallowed him his disappearance afterward could not have been more complete.

“ Old Justice Eblen was the man who had, without a doubt, married the couple. The old gentleman had been a semi-invalid for years, and was seized with a sudden dementia very shortly after the date given by the girl as her wedding day. It became necessary to remove him to the State asylum. There he died, a hopeless wreck, shortly after the doctor was drowned.

“ Following the child's birth I made examination after examination, search upon search, of the disorderly papers and records of the justice; but they shed not one single ray of light upon the strange tangle. We advertised far and wide for the missing witness without success; and we even had the squire's body exhumed when the young mother was strong enough for the ordeal, in the

hope that she might recognize in the remains of John Eblen the man who had united her to the young Frenchman. But even that step proved fruitless. Disease and interment without embalming made recognition impossible. I myself could not have sworn to the identity of the body, and I knew the justice well.

"Things were at a standstill for weeks. The girl insisted that she was lawfully wedded, and no one doubted her until a hellish letter,—the most damnable, fiendish lie ever told out of the inferno,—was received by Nate Boone, who was then our sheriff. The wickedness of it chilled and the effect of it stunned us all; it hastened poor Gabe Hudson's death. The man gave no sign of how he suffered, but his spirit died when he read the letter, and it was not long before we stood beside his grave in the little Oakland Cemetery."

"What did that air letter say, Jedge?"

"The dastardly, anonymous communication stated that the writer had performed a fake ceremony between Dr. Jules Marzelle and Hallie Hudson, for which service the physician had paid well, and that he had also furnished money for the writer of the letter to go to Mexico, where any effort to locate him would prove time wasted. There was no effort made, as neither of the young people had an enemy, so far as anybody knew."

"Hit all seems mighty quare, Jedge. Somebody must have had hit in for one or t'other of 'em. Suppose any of that counterfeitin' gang run

out of hyar about that time had anything to do with hit? ”

“ What would they have had to do with it? ”

“ Wal, I don’t reckon anything. . . . Say, Jedge, I’ve allers wanted to ask you if the gova-mint ever got any more evidence ’gainst them air fellers. Seems like you would know? ” Gilton ran his hand nervously through his hair and looked up at the ceiling.

“ I believe not. At least, I have been reliably informed that there was very little evidence secured at any time. ”

“ An’ you never found out who had a grudge ’gainst the gal or the doc? ”

“ That one letter, whether the work of maniac or devil, is the only proof in existence,— the only clue we have ever had,— of ill feeling on the part of a human being. I am powerless to prove it, but the letter is a lie. ”

“ But, Jedge, you ain’t cheeped ary word yit ’bout whar the money come from for the boy’s eddikation, ” remonstrated Gilton.

“ I am coming to that part of the story now. I told you it would be a long one. The elder Marzelle, with feelings bewildered and torn, stayed here for a month, endeavoring to persuade the young mother to take up her life across the sea, but the bond of affection for her old home held firmly taut and remained unbroken. Every persuasion failed; so, after bidding her and the tiny one an affectionate good-bye, he returned to his home in

southern France. Before leaving, however, he placed a fund in trust with me, on deposit in a Ridge City bank,—for the child's education. The old gentleman still lives, and I render an account to him from time to time.

"As Hallie began to recover from a long illness I took up the task of comforter and adviser. I talked myself almost deaf, dumb, and blind, reasoning with her as to the wisdom of accepting the money. She finally did so for the boy's sake, but there has been a strict stewardship kept by her. She converted the little old homestead into a chicken ranch, and by close management, thrift, and economy she has provided for their simple wants and educated her son,—first in schools near home and afterward at college in Springfield. But the greater part of the fund for the boy is left; as yet it is untouched. Now you know where the money came from."

"Wal, say now, Jedge, why in tarnashun do you reckon they married so kinder foxy like thet erway? Huh?"

"Surely, man, you are aware, if you will only look back upon your own youth, that it is a habit that the lad and the lass have of viewing life through the rose-tinged glasses of romance rather than the homely spectacles of reality. Hallie never mentioned the marriage to me but once after the coming of that damned letter. It seemed that Dr. Marzelle had grown ambitious to become a great surgeon, since the light that lies in a young

wife's eyes can spur a man to better things. I myself think that the deep affection of the hill maiden was the incentive to the mapping out of a splendid future. He intended leaving the Knobs for a broader field of action, but did not wish to have the news of his departure spread until all preparations were made. His correspondence disclosed a negotiation for the care of Gabe Hudson at a first-class sanitarium. The marriage was to be announced very soon to the bride's father and friends, the couple were to start with Gabe, and, after settling him comfortably in the Berkshires, they were to set sail for the young man's old home."

"By dawggies, they couldn't have fixed hit up much crazier ef they both had been loons along with the squire."

"Well, they were both young. The doctor, I know, had lost none of the poetry of his own vine-trailed hills; perhaps the very secrecy appealed to the romantic side of their youth,—that beautiful golden plea of youth. . . . At any rate, you know the full story now of the marriage, the birth, the mystery, and the lie,—the blackening, heinous, damnable lie,—and you have learned where the money came from to send the boy to school. Of course every one in the hills is aware that Jules acquired a knowledge of the law in my office. He knew more law at nineteen than the average man knows at forty,—yes, more than many a lawyer knows at forty."

"Hit's a mighty quare story, Judge Barton. Do you reckon Hallie's boy knows? Huh?"

The man did not meet the penetrating gaze of the Judge, who replied after a slight pause:

"I cannot answer as to that. If the boy has learned of the mystery surrounding his birth,—and I am sure that he has,—he is philosopher enough to keep it well locked within his own breast, and to hitch his wagon to a star."

"I 'low hit would be mighty strange ef the boy hain't ever heered hit. Huh?"

"During his stay in my office we talked long and often of his father, but the tangled marriage was never alluded to. If he has never heard, I feel sorry for the fellow who first imparts the information."

"Does Brilly Barker know, Jedge?"

"Why, I suppose the Captain has told her long ago."

"Do you reckon her and Jules will ever git married?"

The Judge betrayed a rising annoyance at the continued cross-questioning. "Oh, I don't know. You will have to ask them. It seems to me you are showing rather a new and unusual amount of interest in your neighbor's affairs."

A surly toss of the head was the only evidence that Gilton noticed this remark. "Wal, I 'low his mammy's a fool to think he'll ever git through 'thout somebuddy or t'other a-throwin' hit at him. You know they air jes' boun' to, Jedge."

"I suppose so," the lawyer replied tartly. "That's why I hate to hear of his entering politics and rubbing against the dagger's edges. A fine-tooth comb is taken to the past of an honest man while a reprobate basks in the limelight unscathed, with the door to the closet that holds a real skeleton held tight by the weight of tainted money. But that boy has something great in him — so had his poor father."

"Wal, I don't know. His dad, the Doctor, didn't act very squar, with the gal, to my way o' thinkin'."

"Stop!" thundered Bob Barton; and he brought his fist down so heavily upon the walnut desk that a picture of the "Charge of the French Cuirassiers" that had once belonged to the dead physician shook upon the wall in a faint echo of how the earth must have trembled at Waterloo. "Don't! Don't set yourself up to judge a man with the blood of an emperor in his veins,— a man of such splendid character that he could ride out unselfishly in an unknown country the darkest night that ever closed down upon these hills, in the face of the worst storm the Almighty ever sent into the Ozarks, to alleviate the misery of a country yap that didn't have enough of this world's goods to fill a gnat's ear. A man who could do a thing like that could never injure a human being, especially an innocent, trusting girl. No; there's something terribly wrong somewhere. It is slow in coming to light, but I have never given up the hope that

just as sure as the Omnipotent One is Justice and Love truth some day will penetrate these Knobs,— as the gentle summer rain does the soft earth over the ashes of Jules Marzelle,— and vindicate his memory.”

“Wal, I wouldn’t be so shore erbout hit. Hit’s been too durn long a time in comin’. Now I ’low the only truth there ever war come to light in thet air letter. Women folks is the devil you know. Thet air gal was jes’ a common, ornery scrub, an’—”

“Don’t you say it!” The hickory chair went over with a thud. “Don’t you say it, or I’ll crush you as I would a centipede and throw your dirty carcass through the window.” The man leaped from his desk and stood towering above the other, with fists clenched until the knuckles showed chalk white. His voice had grown husky and strange in the pressure of his passion. “What have you against that helpless, long-suffering woman whose life has been an open book to the whole countryside? You are the first man here among us, rough and rugged as we are, to throw a stone. What’s up? Say, Gilton?”

“Why, Jedge,” the man argued, “there’s no call to git so riled. I only ’lowed what every-buddy—”

“You lie — you know you lie,” wrathfully interrupted the lawyer. “I see through it all. It’s some campaign deviltry you’re up to. If so, take solemn warning. Dare bring this story up against



Hallie Marzelle's son and the coroner will have to hold an inquest over you in sections."

The sallow tint of the dark man's face and neck flushed to a deep, dull red. He sullenly picked up his hat from the floor.

"Wait a minute. Here are your damned papers." The Judge reached into a pigeonhole and pulled out a large rubber-banded envelope. "Get some one of your own caliber to take your case. I'm through with you for all time to come. You do not know the first principle of humanity."

The door closed behind Gilton in a bang that carried with it a malicious threat. The face of Robert Barton was gray in its misery; the muscles of his throat stood out like tightened cords, and the strength of the man was shaken as his deep voice rose, then fell to a trembling whisper:

"O Lord, for the boy's sake wipe out this miserable stain of mystery and give Hallie into my keeping. The clouds are lowering about her again. There is no one to protect her but Thee. I can but stand powerless,—helpless,—after loving her so long. Dear God, how long,—how long?"

An hour later Judge Barton was riding out of Bakersville at a brisk lope, his hat pulled well down over his eyes, an air of dejection about his strong frame, on his face a settled gloom that even the peacefulness of the afternoon could not dispel.

## CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE sun was sinking below the crest of Eagle Bald. The deep cream and heliotrope bars of the western horizon were slowly turning into long shafts of pink amaryllis, sea-foam green, and cloth of gold. Bluebirds, redbirds, and full-throated robins sat side by side with meadow-larks and mockers, or flitted noiselessly through the trees, silent in that hush of Nature's benediction that comes with the twilight hour.

Down the rough-rutted shady road, cut here on the straight, and there on the bias, so characteristic of mountain highways in Missouri, rode a young man on a proud-stepping black mare. A well-shaped head, with a mop of dark brown hair, was bared to breezes that touched his face lightly like the caressing fingers of a dream nymph. On his face was a clean, fearless look,—a challenge of right from out the windows of an unsullied soul.

Handsome, strong, quick to think and quick to act, tender yet manly, Jules Marzelle, the rider, had never as yet come in contact with anything from the shady side of life.

A slightly discolored gray felt hat rested upon the pommel of the saddle. Its owner, at peace

with the world and himself, rode slowly, humming a popular rural melody in a minor key.

A monster flock of homing crows, flying low on their way to bed at the big roost on Turkey Hop, shut out the light of day for a moment, and had just passed over in their hurried flight when the sound of familiar hoofs in a brisk trot upon the flinty road-bed attracted the attention of the bare-headed horseman. It was Robert Barton approaching by the road that skirted the base of the hill.

"Howdy, Judge Barton; howdy do, sir," the young man cheerily greeted the newcomer.

The Judge waved a broad hand in salutation and drew rein where the two roads forked. The one he had followed from Barkersville led on around a sharp bend, over a log bridge across Mink Creek, past the Hudson homestead, coming out on the early freighting road beyond.

"How did your Andrews case come out, Jules?"

"Hung jury, sir. They would have hung, too, until judgment day, I suppose. Just another old 'bad man' play. Four of the jurymen held out for conviction. I had a sort of sixth sense intuition all along that Hum Gilton had them fixed."

"Hum Gilton, Jules?"

"Yes, sir. One of the boys told me he had reason to believe that Gilton is after Andrews' eighty. Now what do you suppose he wants with an eighty of rock that couldn't raise crab-grass?"

They say Bud Cates, one of Hum's crowd, told while drinking that the Andrews place shows lead and zinc."

"And so in order to get possession of a man's land Hum would make an effort to convict the owner upon a trumped-up charge and perjured evidence, as well as by means of a fixed jury. Jules, that man Gilton is more crooked than any of us have ever dreamed. His methods are lower than a snake's tail in plowed ground." A vigorous expletive broke from the Judge's lips.

"Why, Gilton is your client, sir."

"No, Jules; to-day I turned him out of my office for good. I'm convinced that he's planning something crooked now. Whatever you do, steer clear of him."

The Judge's earnestness stopped the younger man from laughing.

"All right, Judge, I will. Though Hum is too ignorant to hurt much. . . . I am very hungry, Judge. I had to dig up some authorities to-day at noon and I didn't have time for a bite of dinner. No doubt the Little Mother is waiting for me with chicken pie on the evening bill of fare. Come home with me and get some of it, won't you?"

The slightest trace of a fugitive smile hung about the Judge's serious mouth as he remarked quietly: "You are still just a youngster, Jules. I wanted to talk over some things with you so badly that in the fear of missing you I have made this trip. I was not wishing for pie; furthermore,

I don't believe your mother has any such delicacy in waiting."

"You don't know my Little Mother."

"Don't I, though?" The Judge removed his hat as men do upon entering a church. "I knew her long before you did, my boy. As the embodiment of orderliness she has probably eaten her own frugal meal before now and has the calves and chickens in bed for the night."

But Jules alone, even better than Bob Barton, was aware of the kindly patience, the unmeasured depths of love, the sweet, untiring endurance of his mother.

"Let's flip for chicken pie, Judge. Heads I win."

"That's a mere child's game, Jules."

"Ah, come on, Judge! Suppose it is just a boy's lark; what are men? Mere boys grown tall, as the 'pome' says. Get down here, we can walk much better. Got a half? All right,—age before—well, I won't say beauty, but frivolity. Flip her, sir."

The Judge dismounted protestingly, but produced a silver coin from a worn wallet and tossed it lightly in the air. It fell upon a patch of green sward. The younger man snapped his fingers excitedly as both stooped low to examine the fallen money. The goddess of liberty, in stiff cap and drapery, stared at him.

"Come on, Judge; it's chicken pie."

A walk of a very few moments brought the

travelers in sight of a low story-and-a-half log farmhouse. The well-raked grassy yard was dotted here and there with numerous tiny latticed coops, each imprisoning a Leghorn mother, while her fluffy progeny ran at large.

A little jungle of lilac trees, their crowns of fragrant lavender quite gorgeous in the flush of eventide, nestled beside the porch, while row upon row of hollyhocks, golden-glow, and blue-bells nodded their shapely heads along the pathway.

Among the tiny coops in front of the house stood a woman in an attitude of expectancy. The south wind blew a neat gown of figured percale closely around a well molded, trim, daintily curved form. One slender hand shaded gentle brown eyes focused upon the approaching party while the other encircled a blue bowl resting in the hollow of her arm.

Making a trumpet of his sun-tanned fists, the younger man called out: "Howdy, Little Mother, howdy! Got anything good on the evening bill of fare?"

Stooping, the woman lifted a plump pullet from among the flock feeding at her feet and held it high in the air, waving a wordless but a most significant answer.

"See that? She means chicken pie, by gum. The Goddess of Liberty scorns to lie, Judge. The Little Mother never fails me."

The words rang and rang in the big man's ears, —"The Little Mother never fails me." He could

see the great world stretching out before his young friend on the shining wings of the morning; he could hear the voice of a Lorelei luring him on, on, to the narrow, thorn-flecked heights of Ambition; and Bob Barton's heart was heavy. A lump arose in his throat as it had once before such a short time ago when the thought of the boy's father had overcome him. Once again he prayed: "O God, be merciful to Hallie. Be kind to them both. Let the hour never come when the son shall fail the Little Mother."

## CHAPTER V

THE interior of the comfortable log home was pleasant. Everywhere was the handiwork of the Little Mother. Five or six big splint-bottomed chairs, with clean gingham cushions, were placed temptingly about the main room as if pleading for some one to enjoy them. Rugs, bright and home-made, took the cheerlessness from the shining uncarpeted oak floor. Muslin curtains, bleached to a snowy whiteness, fashioned together neatly in sections by insertions of crochet, defied the closest inspection to discern that they once had set out upon their journey as so many flour sacks. A chintz-covered couch was piled high with sofa pillows. A similarly covered armchair, the boy's own, was placed invitingly beside a table upon which rested two volumes of Blackstone and several State Reports. A grass work-basket, its contents of odds and ends of needlework fairly tumbling over the sides, was upon a tiny stand beside a low rocking-chair; a wide-mouthed stone jar, filled with yellow lady-slippers and trailing woodbine, rested upon the wide hearth, making of it a spot of glory. The season of the year forbade a fire, but there was an immense fireplace with two quaint iron fire-dogs.

The chicken pie appeared, then disappeared,



for both the men did it ample justice. The slight supple figure of the Little Mother hurried about as she cleaned up the dishes while the men were feeding their hungry horses at the log barn.

A sudden clatter of wheels brought the busy housewife from the kitchen to the porch, tea towel in hand, for so small a part of the world goes by in the hills that it is an event of a day when a neighbor or a stranger passes. A voice, like the jingling of bells attuned, called from the gate where the rattle-trap vehicle and the spotted pony had stopped:

"Anybody home? Anybody home?"

"Why, Brilla Barker, what are you doing over here, child? Come in,—come in. Have you had supper?"

The woman advanced to meet her visitor who was now hitching the pony to the rail fence.

"Oh, yes; Aunt Judy gave me suppah early. I'd have been heah befo' now, but a strangah stopped me on my way home from the schoolhouse and then Hum Gilton halted me on my way heah."

"I don't believe I'd have much to say to that man Gilton, honey."

"Well, I reckon I won't heahaftah." There was an uneasy restlessness about the young woman as she rapidly swung her bonnet to and fro in one hand. "Mothah Hallie, do you know I'm ashamed to tell it, but Humwell Gilton has been trying to threaten me into a promise to be his wife."

"What? To marry him, at twice your age, and not a word of schooling?" The question betrayed the woman's shocked indignation. "What can the man be thinking of? And what did you say, Brilla?"

"I tried at first to appreciate the honah, as Uncle says a man can pay a woman no higher homage than by asking huh to become his wife, but Humwell looked so lean and fierce and ugly I just couldn't seem appreciative. Then, when he insisted upon repeating the proposal and telling me all he was worth and would be worth some day, I answered him by saying: 'To be honest with you, if you were the mastah of a universe I couldn't marry you. Why, I have nevah liked you — not even in childhood.'"

"What did the man say to that?"

"He frightened me dreadfully. I was going to Docia McPherson's to stay all night. We hoped to select the speeches foh the last day of school. They ah going to have some political speaking the same day, and I want to have the pupils acquit themselves well. But Pine Ridge looked so lonely when you leave the turn I was afraid to go on, and came heah instead."

For the first time the woman noticed that her visitor's cheeks were colorless.

"That is right. You should not meet the man alone. Still you must treat him kindly, child, for it is better, you know, to have the good-will of a dog than its ill-will." The words were spoken in

well-meant advice, some thought of the man's power to harm having surged with a sickening meaning through the woman's thoughts. "Did he say anything further, Brilla?" she asked.

The girl hesitated. "Oh, I don't know why he dragged your son's name in, but he said he would make us both wish we had nevah been bohn. He said Jules was aftah big fish now, not small fry like me, and intended to 'finish his life high-toned' in the city,—that his ideas were getting beyond us heah. I told him it was Jules' privilege to look at whom he pleased."

There was a catch in Brilla's voice and her chin quivered. She caught her breath hard. A great rush of resentment filled her, but she did not divulge the threat that Gilton had made of making Jules' birth an issue of the campaign, or the further one of revealing her own father's whereabouts to the officers of the law. The man claimed that he knew the hiding-place of Lee Barker.

"Hum said he was willing to bet a hundred dollahs with any one," she continued, "that he could kiss me befo' the summah was half gone and othah threats too ugly to speak of. I told him in very plain words that when I wished a buzzard foh a husband I'd quite likely give him the preference, considering his vast wealth."

"Why, you should not have said that, dear?"

The girl answered impetuously, with chin uplifted: "Now, see heah, Mrs. Mahzelle, you have been like a mothah to me evah since I can

remembah, and please don't think me ungrateful, but when you speak of kindness to that man it makes me almost angry. Why, I'd rathah have the bite of a coppahhead any day than the thought of such a creature kissing me."

"What's that, young lady? Speaking of coppahheads and kisses in the same breath?" The men, having noted the arrival of the schoolteacher, stepped out upon the porch, which the two women had just reached.

The hot blood surged into the younger woman's cheeks as the lips of Jules Marzelle framed the question and the hazel of his eyes met the blue of her own. She turned in confusion to the woman at her side, saying: "You tell them, please. I cannot repeat it. I reckon because I've no one left but an old crippled kinsman folks heah in the hills feel free to insult me."

Biting her lips hard to hide her emotion, the girl made her way hurriedly around the house, leaving the others somewhat astonished by words and actions so unlike the Brilla they had always known. Mrs. Marzelle briefly explained the cause of the girl's distress. The Judge, with arms folded closely across his broad chest, sat down upon the edge of the porch, making no outspoken comment, but his stern grimness spoke volumes, and his unvoiced words were sulphurous enough.

The silence was broken by Jules Marzelle.

"I'll speak to her, Mother," he said, and he turned in the direction the girl had taken.

As the son vanished from sight and hearing Robert Barton stepped close to the Little Mother.

"Hallie, I've come over to beg you again to take my name. Won't you? I know I'm breaking the old promise never to speak again until you said I might, but things cannot go on in this way. You must give me the right to protect you,— the right to stand by the boy now."

"No — no, Robert. You know that until the veil is lifted, every trace of wrong intent wiped out, my husband's honor and my own clear, you may not ask me that. I have fought alone — alone I have drained the cup of bitterness to the very dregs. Waking and sleeping my eyes have ever seen a scarlet letter of shame upon my breast, my ears have heard the sickening whisper of suspicion where I pass, yet I am not ready to give up. I still believe the Truth is only sleeping; and one day it will come forth, glorifying these hills in its resurrection. It must, Robert. Then, not till then, you dear faithful friend, may you speak. But something has happened, Robert. Tell me; what is it?"

"Nothing; only forget that I have broken my word. Come — come on into the house. The girl needs you, Hallie. I am very much afraid Gilton has made the meeting more unpleasant for Brilla than we understand."

## CHAPTER VI

**J**ULES knew where to find Brilla. She was seated on the rustic bench under the big wild cherry tree where together in childhood they had wrestled with the Rule of Three; where the lad had helped the lass to conquer the tyranny of the tables and later, after returning from school in town, had helped her to review the intricacies of algebra and geometry. Upon one arm of the rude seat, carved in many places with the initials of them both, the girl's head lay buried. Jules touched ever so lightly her sunny braids.

"Is this the way a proposal affects you? Come, come, Brilla. Why, there's nothing to it, — only a proof of Hum's good taste. Brace up, child. Mother wants to see you."

Brilla Barker had been sorely tried and she longed with deep yearning for some tender word of sympathy and understanding, particularly from her old friend and childhood's companion. But in many ways she had ever been an enigma to Jules. He stood by now, awkwardly conscious that something should be said, but knowing not how to say it.

Brilla waited a second longer for the words which were not spoken, then arose quietly and followed the young man into the house. Her fea-

tures shone pale and proud in the lamplight that served to bring out the warm, ripe color of her hair and render the deep violet of her eyes almost black. An erectness of carriage, a blending of haughtiness and sweetness often seen in ladies of rank, was this mountain girl's inheritance from a long line of ancestors of Kentucky's best blood.

"Here she is, Mother. Somehow girls are queer. Here we find one weeping because she has had a proposal and rejected it. Her heart was touched, perhaps, by the dejection of the poor suitor."

The girl turned upon him, drawing her slender form up to its full height. The checked pink gingham dress rose and fell over her round bosom with each quickened breath. "What do you know about the heart of a girl, or of anything else for that mattah but law and politics?"

Jules' smile was good-natured as he continued to banter lightly. "Well, if the cap does fit, I'll wear it a bit,— if not, I'll leave it behind."

"Oh, you may laugh at youh old hill friends now that you ah going out into the big world to which we have nevah been introduced!"

The young man looked blankly astonished at the sting in the words. He replied soberly, "Child, I was not laughing at you."

"I am no child, suh; I'm only three weeks youngah than a prospective officeseeker about heah."

"That's right. We are almost twins. I did

not intend to wound you, Brilla, by my foolish pleasantry; honestly I did not. And as for going out into the big world, well — that world has managed to get along very successfully so far without any assistance from Jules Marzelle, poor backwoods attorney at law. I don't know just what you are alluding to."

"Oh, yes, you do." The girl's fine eyes flashed. "You know very well they ah talking you up strong foh Congress. Already I think you ah growing egotistical, Mistah Mahzelle, because, as Uncle says, you ah the chosen one, the idol of both pahties. He says the opposition has to put up a candidate, of course, but it is generally undahstood that all pahty prejudices ah to be set aside in this campaign and youh election made certain, foh the good of the district."

"I think your uncle misunderstands the situation, young lady," replied the lawyer calmly, but not without a slight flush of embarrassment.

Judge Barton glanced in a troubled way from one to the other of these two whom he had known from birth. "No, I think it is all true enough, Jules. I've heard it spoken of just that way, and that is why I'm here to-night. I want to advise you. It would be a mistake for you to enter the race. Don't let any one persuade you to yield."

"And why not, old friend? Have you lost the wonderful faith you used to have in me or have you discovered that I lack sufficient gray matter to represent our people? If called, I'll strive to see



that no furrow shall run straighter than mine.  
Like John Ploughman,

“If I were a cobbler, I'd make it my pride  
The best of all cobblers to be;  
If I were a tinker, no tinker beside  
Should mend an old kettle like me.”

“That is not it, Jules. The political life of to-day is an unclean life. The highest pinnacle attainable might bring to you a measure of wealth and fame; but, under present conditions, happiness and peace of mind — never.”

The Little Mother, with a half-smothered, “Oh,” grasped the young man's coat sleeve as in a vise. “Son, son; you must not let them put you up for office. Promise me, upon your honor, that you will not. It is against my every wish.”

The woman's lips were blanched. Bob Barton looked at her in distress. Upon her forehead in flaming letters he seemed to read the question, “Does Hallie's boy know?” He heard the answer in the tremor of her voice, which was like the wind moaning through the pines in the little graveyard on the hill.

There was an electric current in the air that seemed to touch the group strangely. The figure of Brilla Barker was drawn tense and her fingers dug deep into her pink palms as she gazed spell-bound at the changed countenance of Hallie Marzelle, awaiting in an agony of suspense a reply to her impassioned plea.

"Why, how unlike you, Mother, to tie my hands and deadlock me in this way. Remember, Congress is but a stepping-stone to the Senate and to the Presidential chair. Great men have come from rock patches and scrub oaks in the wilderness. Who knows, fair lady, but your humble chicken ranch upon Mink Creek may send forth a leader of men?"

Who knows? Two forces met that day upon the pathway of Robert Barton's life. The man was torn between love for the long-suffering, patient woman and fairness toward the boy, whose dreams he could understand even as across the mist of the years he could recall his own vague visions passing by on fairy wings.

He knew Jules Marzelle to be brilliant. In the young man there reappeared the father's gifts,—along a somewhat different line,—but nevertheless force and genius had been transmitted from the father to the son. The Judge knew young Marzelle to be well grounded in the practice and the theory of law, as well as interested in governmental reforms and the vital questions of the hour.

He realized that the young man could "make good"; yet it fell to him to take ambition by the throat, throttling it, if possible, as one would a poisonous reptile. To save the boy from what? From the inhumanity of men,—from the mocking revelation of a mystery of birth, already a dangerous concealed weapon in the hands of a cold-blooded opponent.

The Judge's soul was shaken by the pitiableness of his task, and he thought over and over again: "The worldly hopes men set their hearts upon — turn to ashes."

"Why, I'm not afraid, Judge. To the clean all things are clean. An honorable man acting honestly for the common welfare can do his duty and keep himself clear of dirt, even though he has to defy public opinion."

"Jules, you cannot do it. I have learned from experience and close observation that the Decalogue plays not the fraction of a part in modern politics; and as for purification — bah —"

"Why not purification, Judge?"

"What of the corruptionist, the demagogue, the purchased vote, even an unscrupulous press at times? Why, purification can and does exist only as a mirage. In other words, I mean politics and purity refuse to blend. Do you not see temptation on every hand? Do you not see graft everywhere? Much of the fault lies in over-legislation. Our laws are like our colleges of the present day; we legislate and legislate to little purpose; 'we teach and we teach, but we do not educate.'"

"Judge Barton, the whole future of this country depends right now, — you know it and every other lawyer knows it, — upon what will be done toward the repeal of several ill-advised laws. I'd wish for nothing better than the opportunity and the right to —"

The Judge interrupted with a vigorous shake of

the head. "You have never held an office, Jules. You are, as you say, an inexperienced backwoods lawyer. Excuse me, but I must agree with you,—you are very green."

The younger man laughingly retorted:

"That's in my favor, sir. If I'm green I'll grow."

But the boy's flippancy failed to overthrow the older man's dignity and seriousness. "Jules, you are too conservative, quiet, and undesigning to cope with political intriguers. Listen to me. A taste for office-holding is a wrong one for any young man to cultivate. When it comes to a man in his early years it is worse than the craving for opium or morphine, and as deadly in effect. It warps him,—and narrows his views into a dangerous groove of selfishness, covetousness, greed, and vainglory. Like a sucker in the corn, it is a sucker in the heart."

Robert Barton made these remarks with a growing contempt for himself. The words of Victor Hugo shamed him into silence as he contemplated the dreaming lad before him,—“Poverty in youth, when it succeeds, is so far magnificent that it turns the whole will toward effort, and the whole soul toward aspiration.”

“Judge,” the younger man replied, “I should like to see sent into the council hall of the nation broad-minded men from the West and South,—men useful, and far-seeing, who will legislate in a way to increase our nation’s strength and happi-

ness as a whole, not men of narrow views nor men who have the mistaken ideas of many of the past representatives of the West and the South, who indorsed or repudiated a law merely for the effect such a law would have upon their particular section, but —”

“Boy, you are only a dreamer.”

“No, Judge, I am not. But even so, who can say that dreaming is not a gift? Sometimes a dream opens the way to the definite development of a wonderful plan. Statesmen practice that which the dreamer, the poet, has thought out long before. A dreamer, a poet, pictured the universal peace that the whole civilized world has its statesmen and philanthropists striving for to-day. Better men than I am have been dreamers, and these dreamers accomplished a great deal.”

Bob Barton knew the boy to be a student quick to acquire a comprehensive grasp of conditions, possibilities, and opportunities,— one unafraid to act wherever injustice or wrong needed righting; therefore he listened intently as Marzelle continued: “I should have but little respect for my country did I believe there are no good men left in politics. Surely a man, after winning upon the record of his merits, may force any honorable question to a hearing. I do not fear to offer myself as a candidate, and if I should be elected I shall refuse to indorse everything that savors of corruption. If I should represent these honest hill folk, my position must be as clear to the world as it is

here among them to-day,—where my name is a synonym of honor, my word my bond.”

For a moment not a sound broke the spell. “Where my name is a synonym of honor.” The Judge turned away,—overcome by a tortured conscience. Hallie Marzelle was as one turned to stone. The words cut like a lash.

Brilla Barker, with the intuition of her sex, could see in the heart of the other woman the deep scar of the scorching fire, unquenched by the years of tears. A wave of understanding pity swept over her. Looking full into the eyes of the son, she said, a small hand with accusing forefinger pointing toward him: “Jules Mahzelle, you must not do this thing. It is the first sacrifice, the first concession, I have evah known youh mothah to ask. Theah ah none so blind as those who will not see. Please give it up, Jules. Don’t run for office.”

“What a mountain of a mole-hill you dear folks are making. Come, we’ve been as solemn as Quakers if not quite so silent. Let’s forget all about politics. We are going over to Walker’s to-night, and we’ll enjoy the fun. I promised the boys I’d bring Mother. We will put up your rig, Brilla, and we will all go from here in the old hack. Won’t you and the Judge return with us for the night?”

“That will be unnecessary, thank you. I had no intention of going, but if youh Mothah will ride ovah with me I can go home with my uncle. He

is to play foh them to-night." She spoke listlessly, discouraged by Jules' failure to answer either his mother's plea or her own.

Assisted by the girl, the mother made her simple toilet for the country frolic. Silently her tears fell. There was no word of protest and the stillness was unbroken in the tiny attic bedroom for some time. At length, Brilla, her own breath coming fast, pressed Mrs. Marzelle to her breast.

"Don't worry, deah. It must all come right befoah long. You know you do not tread the road alone. Sometimes my own burden seems to get almost past the bearing. To-day I met a strangah on the way and he asked me if my fathah was living heah. In that moment I realized more bitterly than I evah have what it means to be the child of an outcast, the daughtah of a man accused of crime. My fathah, wheah can you be this night, leaving me alone to carry the stain?"

For the moment the woman forgot her troubles in the task of comforting the stricken girl

## CHAPTER VII

**“HELLO!** — hello! — Blamed if I intend to be turned down here! I'm too tired to drive another step. Hello! — hello there!”

A tall, rugged mountaineer, with a heavy shock of dark red hair, appeared in the doorway of the cabin.

“Whut could I be doin' for you, Mister?” he asked.

The traveler answered: “I should like to obtain a night's lodging for myself and food for my horse. I've been on the road since early morning, and I'm too weary to travel another mile.”

“Whar be you going?”

“This is the end of my journey. I intend to stay in this neighborhood for a while.” The young man went on to explain, “I'm just out to see the country on a pleasure jaunt.”

“Whar be you from, Mister?”

“I'm from New York.”

“Got any trade?”

“I really follow no regular trade. I'm an assayer when I feel like working.”

“A whut, did you say?”

“I make a business of analysing and determining the composition of metallic ores.”



"Excuse me, feller, but I 'lowed at fust you said you war one of them there long-eared animals."

The sly twinkle that accompanied the remark was not lost upon the traveler, who replied somewhat tartly, "Judging from the time I'm having to get a night's lodging, it seems that that would answer to my full description."

"You right shore you ain't one of them air revenuers a-sneakin' erroun'?" The occupant of the cabin door eyed the newcomer sharply.

"I'll be hanged," whispered the stranger between his teeth, "if this isn't worse than examining for insurance a man employed in a powder magazine." Looking squarely at the hill man, he replied, "I assure you, my good friend, I am just who and what I say I am."

"Wal, hit wouldn't mek a pow'ful mite of diffrunce to me ef you war a govaminter, sence I 'bide by the law myself; but they is folks hyar in the hills thet thinks the Good Man give 'em the right to use a bit of this hyar timber, seein' as how He war the one whut planted hit for man's use and benyfit, an' not the govamint's. By dawggies, Mister, I'm right peart sorry, but I reckon you'll jist have to hump the road ag'in."

"Oh, come now, you've just got to keep me. I'll pay you well. The people at the last house said they would, but they were making preparations to leave home for the night."

"Wal, now, that's jist hit, stranger. We uns

have got a shin-dig an' a candy-breakin' hyer to-night. Some on 'em's a-comin' from away over yon side of Deer Crik and t'other side of Sugar Bowl Mountain. Thar's allus a big crowd at the doin's, an' a half a dozen or so come expectin' to stay for whut ary part of the night's left. I 'low you see jist how hit is, don't you, Mister? "

The traveler was plainly perplexed. " Well, if every one is coming here, where the dickens can I get in? I don't want to intrude upon your festivities at all, but I'm not prepared to stay out over night in your cool mountain air. Besides, I am told there are catamounts in these hills."

" Wal, I 'low thar ain't no other way outen hit."

As the tall fellow turned to re-enter the house the stranger, remembering the words of the girl he had met upon the roadway, made a last stand: " Captain Barker directed me here from Gum Spring. He said that some of you good people would shelter me."

The rugged hill man whittled awhile upon the stick he held in his hand, studying, with a doubtful, puzzled frown; then he replied: " Wal, whut Cap' Barker and his niece gal says ginerally goes erroun' hyar with us greenies. Git out; you kin stay all night, but you jist cain't sleep in ary bed. You'll have to make hit out with a shake-down, and take whut you git."

" I'll be a thousand times grateful for that. My name is Hamilton; yours, I believe, is Walker? "

" Yes, suh,— Walker. Come on in. Phoeby,

my woman, 'll git you a snack tureckly, an' I'll 'tend to your hoss and rig. So you met Captain Barker?" inquired the host with interest.

"Yes, sir; on the road this afternoon."

"Wal, Cap' Barker, he's all right. By dawg-gies, he's a mighty fine, high-toned old feller; but his younger brother Lee, the gal's dad, turned out to be an ornery cuss. He got to tankin' up on moonshine, an' some on 'em says he got to foolin' with babbit metal an' moulds too. Anyway he had to git out, and git quick, right arter the gal was born. Somehow, myself, I never did think outside o' drinkin' mountain dew he war any mo' guilty of wrong-doin' than ole dawg Tray."

Even as they were speaking guests for the evening began to arrive; and the man from the East had barely time to eat hurriedly the proffered "snack" before the country folk poured in in rapid succession.

There were couples on two horses and couples on one, the lady riding behind; young men on mules and whole families in big, dependable Springfield wagons; a couple of ox-drawn carts, a style of locomotion very slow but very sure; an occasional man and his wife in a strong buggy, with a trio or quartet of youngsters tucked away in a very small space, with wonderful disregard for juvenile comfort.

The candy-breaking and hoe-down at Rufe Walker's big cabin on Hickory Ridge once a year meant as much in a social way to the hill-dweller

as the Horse Show or a "first night" to society in the metropolis. Swallow-tails and silk hats, chiffons and messalines, were conspicuous by their absence, for this was purely an assemblage of gingham and jeans. American Beauties were there, 'tis true, not in tall cut-glass cylinders nor pinned in the lace of ladies' corsages, but in the crisp cleanliness of outdoor living on the cheeks of the Ozark lassies.

Homely hospitality; the sparkle of bright eyes; hearty, genuine laughter, and honest, open love made up for any lack of costly hothouse blossoms, shaded lights, or jeweled favors.

Capt. Henry Clay Barker, with his violin in his hand, aristocratic of bearing, democratic of speech, stumped in upon his wooden leg,—a man who would attract attention in any gathering; the star of the first magnitude in the large assemblage.

His keen, brown eyes caught sight of his road-way acquaintance endeavoring to obscure himself in a far corner. The old gentleman, after a calm, searching glance of mingled indifference and scorn, coolly turned away without any show of recognition.

Young Hamilton,—scion of wealth and position, city aristocrat, a man of leisure, upon the present outing merely for the purpose of throwing off the *ennui* that had obsessed him for half a year, — felt tiny and abject in the presence of the stately old warrior. With the same ease of bearing, however, that had made him the most popular leader

of cotillions for five seasons, he crossed over to the veteran, holding out his hand.

"Please allow me to apologize for my thoughtless speech of to-day, Captain," he said. "I assure you I am sincerely sorry. I would count no favor greater than a pardon and the privilege of being numbered among your friends."

"Young suh," replied Captain Barker, "a man is nevah so much a man, so truly a gentleman, as when acknowledging an errah. I grant you pah-don fully and freely, suh; but remembah in the futuh to believe every man noble until his baseness is proven. Believe *no* woman base."

The incident was closed with a stately inclination of the head and a grand flourish of the hand. "I hope I find you enjoying ouh primitive social world, suh?"

"Very much, indeed," answered Hamilton. "Mr. Walker has kindly given me shelter for the night."

The arrival of other guests attracted the attention of the Southerner, and the conversation ended.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE stranger turned his gaze to the door, through which, just entering, was the quartet from Mink Creek,—Jules Marzelle and his Mother, Robert Barton and Brilla Barker.

Laughing at some pleasantry, the girl entered beside the Judge, but was immediately aware of the stranger's presence. It seemed to embarrass her. She stood twining and untwining her fingers in the shy nervousness of modest young womanhood, while Rufe Walker, the obsequious mountaineer host and floor committee unto himself, proceeded in his warm, uncouth hill fashion to make every one "acquainted" and at home.

"Jedge Barton, this hyar gennelman is Mr. Hamilton from New Yawk. He's a-stoppin' with me fo' the night. Mr. Hamilton, this hyar lady is Mrs. Marzelle, and this un is Miss Brilly Barker, our schoolmarm. This young feller hyar is Mr. Jules Marzelle, an' I'm proud to 'low our next Congrissman."

"Now, now, Rufe," retorted the young lawyer, "the political incubator is just being set, and you know the danger of counting the great unhatched."

There was a general handshaking, good cheer, and an immeasurable depth of hospitality. Peals

of laughter issued from the lean-to kitchen where a bevy of girls made merry over huge platters of barber-pole candy, which they were breaking stick by stick into two pieces,—one long, one short.

Under the skillful manipulation of the Kentuckian, the ancient-looking scarred brown fiddle soon began to send forth the strains of happy-go-lucky hill tunes. "Put Mo' Rosin on Yo' Bow," and "A Leetle Mo' Suga' in My Coffee O," were followed by "Sheep an' Hog Walkin' in the Pastur', Sheep Says to the Hog, Trot up a Leetle FASTER," "Blue Mule," and "Granny's Ole Blind Goose."

The puncheon boards echoed to the tread of busy feet in cowhide boots, shuffling in obedience to the stentorian commands of "Shakespoke" Gus, a fat, husky caller from Snake Trail, poetically inclined, who thus rhymed the figures off:

"Swing youh pardner,—step up, Si;  
Fust lady to the right,—that's you, Di.  
Doh-se-doh,—oh you, Miss Chloe,—  
S'lute youh pardner, swing or cheat,  
Min' youh corns and Sim's big feet."

When the merry-making caller shrilled out, "Right hand to youh pardner; gran' right and left," it was the signal for a mighty outburst of "The Houn' Dawg Song."

Old and young, big and little, their bodies swaying rhythmically to the weird, wild tune especially made to fit the Ozark "hoe-down," formed one large circle about the room, alternating man and

woman, boy and girl, every one stepping into place as if by magic and moving lively to the quaint, sing-song melody of

"Every time I come to town  
The boys keep a-kickin' my dawg aroun';  
Mek's no diff'runce if he is a houn',  
They gotta quit a-kickin' my dawg aroun'.

"They gotta quit a-kickin' my dawg aroun',  
No matter if he is a yaller houn',  
With ribs showin' through an' jes' one eye soun',  
They gotta quit a-kickin' my dawg aroun'.

"By dawggies, Spot is a good ole houn'—  
He can tree a coon or run a rabbit down;  
He's a mighty good friend, sir, an' I'll be boun'  
They gotta quit a-kickin' my dawg aroun'.

"Goin' down to Beaver Crik, goin' in a run,  
Goin' down to Beaver Crik to get my rusty gun;  
Mek's no diff'runce, sir, who's got the mun,  
If they kick my dawg there's goin' to be some fun."

Brilla Barker and Jules Marzelle mingled freely with the guests, but did not at any time join in the noisy dance. The Little Mother busied herself helping the good woman of the house to put on the big tables on the wide porch plates of home-cured ham and sausages, fried chicken, biscuit, tiers of pies, and old-fashioned jelly and pound cakes, while the aroma of coffee filled the air.

Now and then the good woman from whom "nothing could take the qualities of mind and heart that go to make the lady," noting some young mother burdened with a child on her hip,



and gazing wistfully at the dancers, graciously and with true neighborly kindness relieved her of the tiny one long enough to permit her to enjoy at least one turn of the dance.

Then came the event of the evening,—“the breakin’.” The barber-pole striped sweets, placed in a large pasteboard box, were passed about among the guests. A hole in the top of the box, just large enough to admit a hand, made “the drawin’” one of “sight unseen,” and the young men and women who pulled out the shortest pieces were prize winners. But the envied one of the occasion was the belle or beau who drew the shortest bit in the box, since this favor of fortune entitled to a “leadin’” in the breaking.

A great clapping of hands and stamping of feet met the falling of the coveted prize to Linda Louise Wetherell, a black-haired, dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked belle from Pigeon Creek. Cries of “Who you goin’ to brek hit with, Lindy?” and “There’s Hum peekin’ in the door; mebbe he has the piece matchin’ your’n” raised a general laugh.

Some one called out: “By crimps, Lib Clevinger’s got the rest of thet stick. You air shore goin’ to brek with him, Lindy.”

A dazzling smile that was half a challenge from black-eyed Linda Lou brought forward a big, clean lad whose long acquaintance with the chopping axe in the timber had given to him the splendid body and the agile grace of a mountain lion.

The girl handed her short bit of candy to young

Lib. He gallantly placed one end between his lady's teeth and took the other end in his own. Each nibbled bit by bit nearer the other until there was a meeting of lips, then an open hearty kiss amid the cheers and harmless jokes of the on-lookers.

Couple after couple followed the first pair in "the breakin',"— a joyous country play, old to the gathered company, so new to the city man.

Brilla held herself aloof from Jules Marzelle as well as from her new acquaintance, Pike Hamilton, who watched her every motion and wished to know her better, to learn more of her life, her hopes, and her ambitions. The reverence she paid to her old kinsman, the tender womanliness of her, touched him strangely.

Used as he was to the languid wiles and studied coquetry of the luxuriant orchid type of city belle, the girl in striking contrast reminded him of some slender graceful fern designed by Nature for the cool, restful seclusion of the verdant woods.

"Hyar, Miss Brilly, you hain't broke with no-buddy. Who matches you? . . . They've all ben matched up now, but you and Jules and Mr. Hamilton hyar. You got er long, didn't you, Miss Brilly? Then one or t'other of 'em's got a short." So spoke Rufe Walker, the zealous host.

Pike Hamilton's heart struck an automobile pace as he glanced at the bit of candy in the girl's hand, then instinctively at the bit in his own. But upon second glance it was quite plain that the young

lawyer had a closer match to the schoolteacher's.

A voice from the doorway interposed.

"I 'low as how I've got the match for Brilly's."

A short, plump girl spoke up quickly: "No, you hain't. You didn't draw when I passed the box; you know you didn't, Hum Gilton."

"Yes, I did. You've forgot erbout hit, Chloe Masters."

The dark face of the man Gilton wore a sinister, satisfied smile as he advanced toward the proudly erect figure of Brilla Barker.

"I've got you matched, gal," he said.

"I don't think you have, Hum," replied Jules Marzelle quietly.

"Wal, come up now, everybuddy, an' see if I hain't." Gilton stepped over to the girl's side, rudely snatched the bit of striped sweet from her hand, then fitted it first to Marzelle's broken bit and then to his own. "See, I'll leave it to ary one hyar to say ef I hain't right. Come on now and brek with me, Brilly."

The look of malicious triumph on the man's face, coupled with his bet of the afternoon, turned the girl faint, but she walked away and seated herself in an empty chair beside that of the stranger.

"I'm not in the breaking," she answered proudly.

"Oh, you hain't? You war in hit tight enough when you 'lowed hit war your politikal friend thet had you matched."

"That is not true," protested the young

woman; "I have not broken candy with any one since I was a child and I don't evah expect to."

"Oh, wal, hit's all right," said Gilton, with a sneer, his glittering eyes fixed upon the shrinking victim of his rage. "I hain't shore thet I want to brek with a countyfitter's gal anyway."

Brilla Barker shivered. A sharp shooting pain crossed her heart, a quivering "Don't" broke from her lips.

Jules Marzelle, Robert Barton, Rufe Walker, and Hamilton, the stranger, started for the insolent speaker at the same time, while a buzz of indignation ran throughout the room. But it was the voice of Brilla's old schoolmate that called, "Coward," as his quick clenched fist struck out, landing violently upon Gilton's evil face.

"Stand back, Judge," commanded Jules. "Stand back, Mr. Hamilton, it's good of you to take it up; but this is my fight."

"No, by thundah, suh, this is no one's fight but mine. Get back, boys. Now come on, Gilton; I'll lick the devil out of you. Then you will apologize to the lady quick, suh."

The physically big man had undergone a transformation. Not in his gigantic stature that was impressive at any time but in his features and in the movement of his body the great change was noticeable. Henry Clay Barker was a younger man by thirty years.

"Let me do the punishing for you, Captain."

"No, suh, Jules; no, suh. It is fah mo' be-

coming that I teach the reprobate a lesson, suh."

The soldier was back again on the firing line at Wilson Creek. Through the scrub oak he heard the Federal yell answered by his own gray boys as they charged fearlessly across the oak ridge. It was the spirit of 1861 broken loose.

"I won't fight with you at yore age an' one of your laigs gone," said Gilton.

The hot blood beat hard upon the temples of the man who was once again the captain as he shouted vigorously:

"Theah is nothing to mind, suh, except that this has to be done in the presence of ladies, suh. My yeahs cut no figah whatevah and I don't intend to fight with my legs. This is an honahable and trusty weapon, you vipah."

The Kentuckian's right fist went out in a flash, raining blows fast, furious, and telling upon the head and shoulders of the half-cringing Gilton,—blows from which the man but poorly defended himself. The Captain's friends interfered shortly, but not before Humwell Gilton had had quite enough of the Southerner's vengeance and had professed an immediate willingness to apologize.

The girl, Brilla, refused to listen to a word, however; so, escorted outside by Walker and Jules Marzelle, the cowardly guest was soon upon his mule, obeying a firm order to ride homeward down the moonlit hill.

## CHAPTER IX

**“SUPPER’S** done dished, Rufe.”

This announcement from Mrs. Walker, wife of the host, served to bridge over the constrained, uneasy feelings of the company. The guests, playfully joking and jostling one another, filed out to the big porch, which, spacious as it seemed, was lacking in accommodation for all.

The overflow of young folk sat upon the grass in the moonlit yard and were served in picnic fashion by Hallie Marzelle and several neighborly matrons. Brilla was the only young person who assisted in the serving. She carried her head high, but when the light fell upon her chiseled features the scarlet flush that dyed her cheeks and brow was palpable evidence of her deep humiliation. Although she was outwardly calm and collected, the girl’s knees trembled as she walked and she felt herself longing for the quiet of the loft bedroom over the ridge, where the tears might fall unrestrained and undetected.

Something that was best in Jules Marzelle seemed to awaken as from his place on the porch he watched Brilla standing alone, apart from the merry throng out under the shadow of a giant elm, and for the first time he was seized with a desire

to take her into the shelter of his arms, to soothe her as he would a hurt child.

As he continued to gaze at the still form an unsuspected warmth stole into the man's heart and held him firmly in its sway. His soul was aglow with the longing to fold this girl within the haven of his love forever; for love had come upon him like a wave. Some numb chord began to throb and the sudden awakening left a cold perspiration upon his forehead.

He recalled their childhood, their schooldays, the lonely life of Brilla with no one but an old negro servant as companion. To what mocking scorn her father's sin had subjected her before an outsider and their own little world! How happy he would be to offer to her his name,— his *honorable* name,— that would serve to shield her from insults all the days of her life. He smiled in sudden gladness at the thought.

The young woman came out of the shadow and crossed the yard toward him. He arose from his place, and stepping to meet her, leaned closely toward her, and under cover of the chattering all about whispered low:

"I've been watching you for the past ten minutes out among the shadows, Brilla. What have you been thinking of out there all alone, dear?"

In her wretchedness the word of tenderness passed for a time unnoticed. She answered drearly:

"Why, I've been thinking of —"

"Of me, Brilla? Can you say it was of me?"

Slowly she looked up and the significance of what Jules was saying seemed to come to her.

"No. I was thinking of my fathah,— of all the mistakes, the cowards, the lies, and the misery in the world."

Tears trembled on her long lashes as she walked on into the house. Silently Jules stood looking at her.

Henry Clay Barker, Bob Barton, and Pike Hamilton had been speaking of the East, but as the young woman entered, her kinsman picked up the violin to resume playing.

"Let me rest you, Captain." It was Hamilton who spoke. "I used to be considered something of a player, and it will be but a small return for the kindnesses bestowed if I may entertain the company awhile."

"Why, yes, suh! I'll lend you the fiddle. You be mighty careful of it, though, mistah. That and this heah wooden stump ah echoes of Wilson Creek, and I think a great deal of them both."

Pike Hamilton lifted the violin tenderly. He touched the strings expertly, adjusting one here, one there. The instrument, mellowed with the sweetness that comes only with age, responded to his touch like some sensitive, conscious thing.

A long sweep of the bow, then the cabin began to vibrate with the ever familiar, beautiful trill of "The Mocking-bird,"—"I am dreaming now of Hallie, sweet Hallie." The notes seemed



to intone the words, and Robert Barton, with bated breath, listened to the song so full of meaning, so charged with sweetness. He was thinking of the grace and the loveliness of another Hallie, a daughter of that old South of long ago. Captain Barker sat leaning forward in his chair, his eyes ashine in silent homage to the touch of an artist.

"Her brow is like the snowdrift," for "Annie Laurie" followed, the song that the boys are said to have sung the night before a famous battle. Hamilton, with fingers trembling ever so slightly, was playing this to the girl Brilla alone. Outside all conversation had ceased. The guests, their supper unfinished, crowded around the doors and windows or crept softly into the room.

The plaintive, touching air, ringing out in all its sweetness, was caught up by the mountain breezes, and wafted down the silvered road, away off through the gorges and over the ridges,—once again a tribute to the brow, the eyes, the throat of a maid.

Generously the simple earthy hill folk applauded the player's skill, and graciously and splendidly did he respond with air after air, from "Turkey in the Straw" to "Lucia."

This feature of the evening's entertainment was long, long a pleasing remembrance, a well-loved topic of talk for the country people from Miller Creek to Oakdale and from Barkersville to Ridge City; and it served afterward as a familiar epoch

from which was reckoned the date of many important hill events.

"Where did you get this violin, Captain Barker?"

"Well, suh, I got that fiddle aftah the fight. One of the surgeons gave it to me when I was a-blazin' and a-raisin' Cain about losin' my leg. He said it would he'p to kill time foh me while I was waitin' on the leg to heal.

"You see it was this way: Befo' the fight theah was a Federal regiment from Iowa that theah Captain had become pow'ful disgusted with because the po' fellows insisted on a-singin' and a-fiddlin'. They say he told them they wasted so durn much time a-whistlin' and a-frolickin' that when an engagement did come on they'd run, as a man, from the very first gray boy with a gun.

"But, Mistah, those merry boys in blue gave that officah the suhprise of his life. The din of the strife echoed all day long, cannon rippin' and bullets peltin' like hail. When the field was strewn thick my own boys linked to it with 'em, suh. We drove that Iowa regiment back inch by inch, step by step, again and again. We rushed together like angry, wounded eagles — they met us with eyes half-blinded by smoke and blood — we crippled 'em and we pushed 'em — we crowded 'em, suh, to the very mouth of hell — and then some. But they stayed with us, suh, they stayed with us; and I take off my hat again, suh, as we

all did that summah day so many yeahs ago, to those rollickin', singin' Iowa lads.

"The fiddle theah was left behind by one of 'em, and I've had it evah since. It suahly carries memories with it, suh,—memories. It's got some initials and some mark or othah right down theah on the back wheah the neck joins the body."

Pike Hamilton turned the instrument over. "G. McD. H.—And what's this? An arbutus leaf, as I live,—the insignia of my own family. And those initials are the same as my grandfather's,—George McDowell Hamilton's. He enlisted from Des Moines, Iowa, too, Captain; but he was killed in the battle of Oak Ridge."

Captain Barker jumped to his feet. "Oak Ridge? Why, good man, don't you know that was the battle of Wilson Creek, suh?" The old soldier, surcharged with trembling excitement, was peering into the young man's face. "We heah about call it the battle of Wilson Creek because that old stream ran red on the tenth of August, 1861, suh."

There was a deep hush, a sacred, solemn stillness everywhere. Presently a whip-poor-will called to its mate far down in the valley and from over the ridge came the deep baying of hounds and the sound of the hunter's horn. The young man's voice was very low and tender as he said:

"And so this is my grandfather's old Cremona?"

Hamilton gazed at the battered, time-stained

instrument with reverent awe. It was several moments before he spoke again.

"Captain Barker, I'd give anything to own this; would you exchange it for mine,—one I have here with me?"

"Why, young man, take it; keep it, suh. My only regret is that I cannot give back to you with it the life of youh grandsiah. I only regret that theah had to be an Oak Ridge, a Shiloh, a Bull Run, and an Antietam. Believe it or not, suh, the feeling with me was lost even befo' the cause was lost. In the tumult of battle, above the blast of trumpets and the roar of cannon, the dying words of 'Gawd' and 'Mothah' all around me banished prejudice, and I could realize the pitiful tragedy of it long befo' the strife was ended, suh. None othah is mo' proud than I to know we ah a united nation undah one flag, every barrier broken and swept away. They tell me theah is a movement on foot now to have ouh govahment take ovah the care of ouh Southe'n dead. This is a generous move, suh; and I hope I may live to see the time when the same pale moon will wrap them all in its misty light, the same evening stah look down upon an undivided band of heroes, among them ouh Confederate dead of Oak Ridge lying up theah at Springfield just across the wall from brave General Lyon and those tuneful Iowa lads, Gawd rest them all, suh.

"Come home with me, my boy,—come home with me. I want to know you, suh; and the old

fiddle,—youh grandfathah's old Cremona that has wept with me in time of sorrow, suh, and sung to me in time of joy,—is youhs now forevah, suh."

The Kentuckian opened wide his arms as if to sweep his young friend within their eager embrace, while tears, the outward symbol of a fineness of civilization, streamed down the rugged furrows that a noble character had traced in his kindly face.

"Naw, by dawggies, he don't go home with you, Cap'," spoke up Rufe Walker. "He's a-goin' to stay right hyar. I said he couldn't sleep in ary bed, but, dad-bust my skin, a feller that kin play 'The Mockin'-bird' so's to make a Missouri warbler ashamed of hisself not only gits to sleep in my best bed, but he kin jump right in the middle of hit, boots an' all."

The laughter that followed waived aside the tenseness that the revelation of the ownership of the violin had brought about. Some one in the gathering called: "Speech, speech!" and the mountaineer host jumped upon a chair.

"Yes, gennelman, an' excuse me, ladies, too: I've bin appinted a committy of one to requist our feller-citizen an' next congrissman from this hyar districk for a speech. We would like to hear his idyees on the good road move, the harnessin' up of the river, an' other questions that touches us back hyar in the Bald Knobs."

Walker and several others seized Jules with

rough, friendly hands and lifted him bodily upon the chair.

"Thank you," he said. "I am happy indeed to be here to-night among a good people in the heart of the Ozark uplift, in a great state of the greatest and most generous country the world has ever known,—our United States of America. I promised myself and several of my dear friends that we would not mention politics this evening, therefore I have only this to say: I am not seeking office. If the office should seek me and I should receive at your kindly hands, dear friends, the honorable privilege of representing you in the council hall of the nation, I will do my duty, and no man among you will ever have cause to say he regretted giving a vote to Jules Marzelle, his friend and neighbor."

The young man spoke with restraint, yet his words carried the suggestion of some hitherto hidden power that sent a thrill through the heart of Bob Barton and added a new weight to the depression of the Little Mother.

It was late, the moon was low in the western horizon, the candy breaking at an end. Already the departing wheels could be heard rolling afar in many directions over the rocky roads. The last guests were saying "Good night."

Pike Hamilton walked with Brilla Barker and the Captain to where the old man's horse, the low phaeton, and the hack from Mink Creek were

waiting. Jules Marzelle and Pike Hamilton started forward at the same time to assist the girl, but it was Hamilton to whom she gave her hand as she stepped lightly into the low vehicle. "Good night," she said in a soft voice, "good night, every one. I thank you for the music, Mr. Hamilton. It was a great treat."

Jules fell back beside his mother. Somehow he felt that between himself and this girl, this old schoolmate and comrade, there was beginning to be an intangible something that seemed to be shaping itself into a yawning and unbridged chasm.

"Did I play your favorite air, Miss Barker? I know that you have good taste," said Hamilton.

"It was all so beautiful there is no cause for complaint,—but you left out my favorite."

"Won't you tell me what is your favorite?"

"I am suah you would laugh, suh. What's bred in the bone is hard to knock out of the flesh."

"Oh, I know," answered the man; "Dixie"?

"Yes,—Dixie," laughed the girl.

"When you get to the foot of the hill stop a moment, won't you, Miss Barker?" Young Hamilton bent near as he made this request.

But Jules Marzelle caught the last few words and Brilla's assenting nod. He did not understand what had passed, but somehow it hurt.

True to her promise, Brilla reined in her pony at the foot of the rocky descent. The Captain,

riding a few steps ahead, paused because the girl did. Before he could question the reason for delay there floated on the still night air the stirring ring of "In Dixie land I'll take my stand."

"Heah, gul, give me that fiddle quick."

Handing to her kinsman the new violin, which Hamilton had insisted that the Captain should take, the girl waited wonderingly.

The big man said to his horse: "Stand still now, Kaintuck. Don't you move a hoof or a haih, suh."

As the last echo of the gripping old song of the Southland died away the one-legged soldier lifted his instrument, tucking it closely under his quivering chin, and responded with all the warmth of feeling he could command by playing "The Star Spangled Banner."

And Pike Hamilton, stranger, heard and, hearing, understood. Lifting his eyes, he uttered fervently, "God bless our country and these honest hill friends I have made to-night."

Thus was a tribute to Defeat and the Lost Cause of the Gray paid by the Blood of the Blue standing in the flush of young manhood upon the Mountain Top, and thus was it answered in a tribute of Victory by the old, maimed warrior passing down into the Valley of the Shadow.

And that summer night the battlefield of Oak Ridge shone fair and pale and lonely in the misty light of a waning moon just as it had shone be-



fore the crisis of a civil war made history there.  
And the white-robed Angel of Peace, leaning far  
out over the golden bars of Heaven, smiled down  
upon a sleeping world.

## CHAPTER X

**L**ONG into the morning Jules pondered over the unusual events of the day. His thoughts were burdened because of the strenuous objections that his mother and the Judge had expressed with respect to his entering the race. He had fully weighed the matter, however, and had decided to accept the nomination.

In truth, as the young man lay so wide awake staring out into the on-creeping dawn he was perplexed by many things. He questioned himself as to his newly found feeling for Brilla Barker, for he had had very little experience with woman-kind.

The calm of the night whispered a message of her, the wind breathed her name through the gently fluttering leaves, and his heart was filled with a great peace; the coming morning bespoke a new day,—a day that had its creation in the soul of a man. The world had somehow undergone a change. It no longer spun drab with the prosaic obstacles and monotony of humdrum duties, but it moved rose-tinged upon the smooth palm of a slender, soft-voiced girl who had the power to crush it for him as a worthless bauble or shape it into a thing of glory.

Yesterday he, Jules Marzelle, was but a boy flipping a coin upon the highway; to-day he is a man of purposeful energy, and life for him is full of meaning. Yesterday he was but a poor backwoods lawyer; to-day he is a prince,— rich in enthusiasm, thought, character, courage, and love.

The dress and the courtly manners of Hamilton had proclaimed him a man of position. And, although he had so recently come among them, Jules could see that the innate sweetness and the tender grace that marked Brilla Barker a superior creature among her sisters of the hills had awakened the stranger's interest. Marzelle wondered if an aristocrat like Hamilton could care for the girl with more than passing regard or count her other than a mere pleasant feature of an idle outing. Brilla he had known since they were barefooted, brown-legged, tiny tads, and together they had waded nearby brooks and found birds' nests. He had been the one to guide her to fairy spots where violets and primroses grew thickest, where blackberries were ripest, where wild grapes hung luscious and low.

Should it be a fair field and no favor? The fierceness of the ancestral cave-man rose within him. Why should he give to a stranger the slightest chance to win the woman he loved,— a woman of his own people, his own land? Why should he let her be lured into an existence in which she would be tossed about as a straw in a current?

No. Just as soon as he was nominated he

would declare his love to her. Then if the time came to leave their hills it would be after his election when the great world called, and together they would go out into it, ignorant of many things, but willing to learn and proud of the splendid teaching received in "Nature's school that holds an unbroken session twelve months in every year."

Pride had served Brilla with friendly assistance at the candy breaking, but she crept to the soothing shelter of her pillow with fevered cheeks. In the darkness she sobbed aloud over the cowardice that made of her father a wanderer on the face of the earth. Why — oh, why had he so cruelly deserted his young wife, her own dear mother who had died praying for him while she clasped her helpless babe to her breast? Why had he shown not a single trace of the nobleness that marked Captain Barker a man among men, one who would remain to defend himself from a charge did it deprive him of life within the hour? The sins of her father weighed heavily upon her.

While Brilla Barker, with spirit crushed, thus sorrowed and Jules Marzelle was dreaming of the wonderful things to be accomplished with her as his inspiration Mrs. Marzelle knelt in her lonely attic chamber and prayed.

"Do not forsake me longer, O God, if Thou lovest justice and hatest sin. If the scepter of Thy Kingdom is the scepter of right, let no man despise my boy and hold him up to scorn. Thou, who art the father of the orphan, hear me; crush

the lie, O God. Thou must know how weary I have grown of this chastisement, this bending beneath the rod."

The woman's faith, so long tried, was beginning to waver while a Kindly Hand at that moment was resting in protecting tenderness upon her bowed head and an Omnipotent Will was preparing a way to lift from her forever the shadow of the years.

And Robert Barton, under the same roof-tree, sat by the window of the living-room, looking out upon the waning night. The Judge understood Jules perfectly. He knew that the boy's determination to make the race was fixed and that nothing that could be said would alter his course. The only hope left was that the nomination might be lost.

Yet what a great statesman Jules, in whose soul glowed the burning future, would make. Barton recalled a conversation he once had had with the boy when he had asked him to define the characteristics of a good citizen. How well he remembered the splendid ring in the ready answer. Like the bell of Old Independence, it resounded high and clear:

"One who is of upright and pure conscience, courageous in danger, patient in affliction, humble in prosperity,—a gentleman and a friend."

The big man reproached himself. Would any one short of a traitor stoop to thwart the ambitions of a character so interwoven with the ideals

of truth,— ideals so rare and, after all, so necessary to the upbuilding of a great nation?

Thus Robert Barton sat alone with his thoughts and watched the morning grow crimson, cool, and sweet. The warm moist earth was sending forth a ravishing perfume as the mists, like great ropes of silver beads, rolled away from the valley.

The twittering choir of birds broke into one grand *gloria* of happy greeting; the flashing of myriads of jewels announced the sun's first kiss upon the dew, and long golden spears spread fan-like from out the blushing east, many knightly couriers heralding with blazoning armor the advent of a king,— another new born day.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE next few days were full of interest to Jules. With the prestige of an unanimous call he was out for the nomination. So far the race did not seem to bear the slightest trace of a spirited contest. The young man was not only a general favorite, but he had become a party leader. In the conduct of his campaign in order to avoid mistakes through inexperience he had asked the far-seeing, level-headed advice of the Judge. For the first time in the boy's life his old friend refused assistance.

"No, Jules. You have my vote, but I'm out of politics forever. I promise, however, to keep my ears open; if I discover an endeavor to stir up dissension I may lend a hand. But in every other sense you must consider me out of the fight. And from the depths of my soul I wish you were."

The finality of Bob Barton's tone as he uttered this unexpected refusal bothered Marzelle more than he was willing to admit. His determination was, however, made: he would accept the nomination for Congress.

Brilla drove to the schoolhouse and back each day. She had seen Jules but once and then in Cap-

tain Barker's presence. Pike Hamilton, who was still the guest of Rufe Walker, had been over to visit her uncle several times, dropping in on his way from hunting and fishing expeditions along the creeks or geological studies of the cliffs and the gorges.

The young man, looking very handsome in his corduroy hunting clothes and high laced boots, made quite a grand impression upon Aunt Judith Harrison, the old-time colored housekeeper of the Barkers.

"Law now, Miss Brilly, you kain't fool dis nig-gah. Dat white man's rich an' he is quality through an' through." Brilla felt her cheeks growing hot as Judy continued: "I wish he'd mek love to you, honey, an' take you away from hyah whar everybody doan' know how Marse Lee done gone back on you an' de Captain. Den Judy would go wif you all, honey, an' mebbe we all could go home to Lexington. I'd shorely make dat low-flung Huldry Jackson, what was 'sponsible for de partin' of me an' my man Gawge, peel huh pop eyes a-lookin' at quality what is quality."

"Oh, Aunt Judy," said the girl, "please — please don't evah let any one heah you saying such a thing. If you want to go back to Kentucky you will have to go alone. I nevah want to leave my Bald Knobs. Without me they would be so lonely." Brilla smiled sadly.

"Lawdy, chile, Judy was jes' er-jokin'. I'se



gwine to stay wherevah you all stay jes' laik I promise youh po' li'l' mammy I would. Don't you all mind, dis nappy-haired Judy ain't evah gwine to leave you. But layin' all prognoster-caterin' aside, Miss Brilly, something's gwine to happen roun' hyar."

"What makes you think so, Judy?" asked the girl as she stood idly tapping the rocker of a chair with one foot.

"Dat was a cross-eyed pullet I done kill foh dinnah yist'day an' dis ve'y mawnin' dat ole yaller buff Laighawn crowed three times in de kitchen do'. Las' night you all's feist jes' howl an' howl, de Captain tuhn ovah de salt at brekfus', an' you ah a-standin' dis very minnit rockin' a empty cheer. Somebody's gwine to die."

Long used to the superstitions of the darkey servant, Brilla shivered in pretended terror as she replied:

"For the land's sake, Judy; you give one the creeps."

The colored mammy shook her head dolefully. "You all gwine to see now. 'Kase I'se de only niggah evah crossed de county line into dese hills ain't no reason why I'se' a fool. Something's gwine to happen, I tells you, white chile."

"Well, I do hope it won't happen to those pies you have in the oven."

Judy, with her hands akimbo upon her ample hips, threw back her head and broke into gales of laughter. "Lawsy, honey, speakin' 'bout pies,

dat remin's me. When dat New Yawk man stopped hyah to eat with youh Uncle Bawkah yist'day on his way from de crik I had pie foh dinnah. Aftahwards de gennelman stepped out into de kitchen an' expressticated a complimunt on de delercateness, an' he axed me how I put dem fancy aidges on de pies. I says, sessi, ' Huh, dat's easy, Mistah; I jes' uses de comb.' "

"Mercy," gasped the girl. "Didn't you tell him that was a trick you learned back in Kentucky and that it was a comb whittled out of pine wood that you kept in the kitchen foh that puhpose alone? "

"No, I didn't, honey; but I seed hit made him kinder sick laik an' pale 'roun' de gills."

"Well, why on earth didn't you tell him, then? "

"I jes' 'low 'twa'n't none of his business what kind er utinsils I uses. I nevah could stand foh no man to come pesssticatin' 'roun' inter my kitchin nohow."

"Well, I'll certainly explain as soon as possible. Between you and Uncle Henry Clay, I reckon the man has set us down foh a tribe of savages. Goodness knows, Judy, it was bad enough foh Uncle to want to fight a duel with him the very first thing without youh telling him we use a comb to put frills on ouh pies."

"Lawsy, honey, now don't go and get mad at po' ole Judy. Dat was jes' a li'l' joke I played on dat city fellah."

"Joke? Why, I expect he has been ill evah since."

"Don't git oneasy. Hit won't hurt him none, honey. Gwine to do him mo' good, ef he's bilious, dan kalomil or ile. Jes' kinder make him a li'l' sea sick, dat's all."

And the dusky joker laughed so heartily that the girl could not find it in her heart to scold further.

"You all seen dat skunk lately, Missy?"

"What skunk, Judy?" inquired Brilla in surprise.

"Dat human skunk, ole Humwell Gilton, chile. I seed him a snoopin' 'roun' hyah dis mawnin' laik a weasel. He had a houn' an' a gun. Doan' you all meet him on de road alone; hit ain't safe, honey."

"Oh, I'm not afraid, Judy," replied the young woman, trying to smile bravely, but shivering a bit instead. "The only thing that bothahs me is that he might be trying to ruin Jules' chances. Virgil Hawley told me at school to-day that Hum and his old crowd,—the three Pape boys, Grant Edmonds, Doss Peale, and Walt Richinson,—have been meeting in the old trappah cabin on the Coon for several nights. Virgil and his cousin saw them while out 'possum hunting and have watched them gathah theah twice since."

"Look a heah, chile; kain't you 'suade dat Virgil schoolboy to snoop up close an' listen to what all dey's up to?"

Brilla answered half absently: "They might try; but I hate to put boys to spying. Yet something,— I know not what,— tells me theah is a nasty plan of some sort undah way, and we ought to find out what it is."

"Yes, an' I'se got a plan on foot, too. Jes' let dat Gilton show his sheep-killin' dawg face 'roun' hyah an' Judy Ha'isson gwine to cave his haid in like a busted pussimmon."

The vindictiveness of the negro woman's speech, the deadly dangerous note, startled her gentle mistress.

"You ah to do nothing of the kind," she commanded with forbidding emphasis. "It would not help mattahs in the least. Hum was only around looking for a stray animal perhaps, and if he comes again and asks you a civil question you ah to reply politely. Always remembah, Judy, syrup is mo' appetizing to a fly than vinegah. It catches quickah."

"Dat may all be so, li'l' missy, but dis niggah 'u'd come a whole lot neahah a-puttin' out a bait of rat pizen foh a varmint laik dat. Now I gwine to tell you all de gawspel trufe, an' I ain't gwine to be mealy-moufed about it: ef dat man evah puts his foot on dis place he's a-gwine to lose his pluri-bus unum."

"I suspect you mean his equilibrium, don't you, Judy?"

"Well, 'librium or unum, it won't mek no dif-f'runce. When I gits through wif him the effect

gwine to be jes' de same. An' I gives you all warnin' right now: I'se gwine to kill dat man ef he evah crosses my path."

"Nonsense, Judy. Don't make such silly, idle threats. It's downright wicked." The words of the servant as afterward recalled seemed to echo more of prophecy than threat. "And don't try to use such strange, big words. You get the meaning all twisted and it sounds ridiculous."

"Lawsy, don't you worry about me. All edikatted folks talks kinda' funny."

Brilla, amused, inquired smilingly, "Oh, then you ah an educated person, Judith Harrison?"

"Now, honey, doan' you go on pokin' fun at youh ole mammy. I hain't got much knowledge, to be sho', but I done diskivver a long time ago dat edikattion ain't all in de books, an' hit doan' mean everything as you trabbels along in dis world. Sometimes folks what thinks dey knows so much mo' dan othahs runs up ag'in' a snag. Yo' li'l' ma used to say dat some folks has knowledge and some folks has wisdom; dat knowledge sets itself up in de high places an' is mighty proud, but wisdom jes' walks along humble an' lowly like, an' sorry dat it doan' know no mo.' Now all ole Judy's got is jes' a mite o' wisdom an' de gift from de good Marster to know how to use dat mite."

"That is a great gift, Judy."

"Yassum. I'd jes' like to 'splain what I means, chile. Now, dey was dat Huldy Jackson what went to school to the fourth grade in Lex-

ington, an' she 'low she know so much mo' dan me, 'kase I jes' got past de place dat reads 'Dis am a cat.' One day I wus a-mixin' my bread wif my hands, puffectly quiet laik, an' within de peace an' dignerty of de state of Kaintuck, when she says sorta high an' mighty laik: 'Nevah mix youh bread wif youh hands, Sistah Judith, 'kase knowledge an' scientiferists teaches hit ain't sanitiferous. Always use a spoon.' An' I ses, sessi, 'Whose a-makin' dese biskit, me or a scientiferist?' 'Well,' she says, 'hit ain't janeteel.' 'Now,' I says, 'look a-heah, I doan' know a frazzlin' thing 'bout no Jane Teel, but seein' as how de white folks all say dat I makes de bes' biskit in de land o' good cooks, ef youh fr'en' Jane will wash huh hands, I am mo' dan willin' to give de lady a few lessons.' Den Huldy got riled an' flew de coop, but bless youh life, chile, I ketched huh de very next day a-takin' de buttah up outen de churn wif huh hands. Den I s'luted huh, an' I says: 'Doan' let no scientiferist or Lady Jane see you a-doin' dat, Sis Huldy. Wisdom done teachd me dat hit ain't sanitiferous.' Now dat's jes' zackly de way wif edikattion. Huldy done acquire w'at she calls de knowledge dat hit wan't de propah capah to mix dough wif youh hands, an' I learn from plain ole wisdom dat hit hain't perlite to handle buttah wif youh paws, an' in ouh edikattion knowledge and wisdom criss-crossed somehow, an' dat's de way hit goes."

"Judy, I'd like to ask you a question."

"Well, go on, chile. Dis cote won't fine you foh contempt."

"Do you still love youh husband,—George? Would you go back to him, Judy?"

Captain Barker, who was coming in from feeding his Berkshires, heard the question and paused upon the kitchen doorstep to hear his old servant's reply, for George Harrison and Judy had been married on the plantation,—the old Kentucky home,—and both had been faithful to the Barker family until their marital differences had arisen. After the family met with financial reverses and decided to settle in Missouri Judy, severing all ties of race and kin, moved with them; but her man George remained in Kentucky.

"Lawsy, honey, I wouldn't nevah 'militate myself to go back to Gawge, 'kase he shorely was de 'fendin' pahty in all of ouh trubbles, but if he was to come back to me sorry laik, I'd follow de teachin's of de faith what says, 'Fohgive one anothah.' I wouldn't nevah ack obstreperated and pig-haided, Miss Brilly, but I'd jes' forgit all laik a bad dream, an' begin life ovah ag'in."

"Somehow, Judy," said the slender girl as she walked over to the faithful negress, whose kindly care she had known since babyhood, and laid one hand gently on the broad shoulder, "I believe things ah going to come out right. Surely He is still in His heaven, and foh what you have done foh me, if foh nothing else, theah must be some wonderful compensation, some just reward. If

you pass on befoh I do, Judy, there shall be engraved upon your headstone these words: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these little ones, ye have done it unto my Fathah who is in Heaven.' But, you poor black friend, you deserve some great blessing heah foh youh loving care of me, a motherless babe."

Captain Barker, as yet unobserved by the two, drew one hand quickly across his eyes and moved back a bit into the shelter of a huge gourd vine that hung beside the kitchen door. The old serving woman, with her dusky, fluttering fingers pressed against her buxom breast and with her thick lips twitching, answered the younger one tremblingly:

"You done grow up to be a good woman, an' I doan' ask foh no mo' reward. I know de Great Marstah undahstand hit all. Mebbe hit would be foh my good if he sent Gawge back to me, an' mebbe hit wouldn't; but whatevah way, He gwine to look aftah me, honey; He is a-gwine to do hit right, an' I hain't evah seen de time yit, no mattah how bad I feels, when I'se ready to pick a quarrel wid de ways of God A'mighty."

"That's a splendid creed, Judy,—one that would improve the human heart and make many a man and woman ashamed of their doubts."

The Captain stepped within the door.

"Look hyah, Marse Henry, I didn't say nothin' to Miss Brilly 'kase I didn't want to frighten huh, but somebody done shot at me when I was down



below de bahn a-huntin' dat stray tuk'y hen dis mawnin'."

"Shot at you, Judy? You ah undoubtedly mistaken, foh why should any one shoot at you?"

"Doan' know, Captain, but I'se pritty sho' hit was dat snookin' Hum Gilton a-tryin' to give somebody 'roun' hyah a debbil's serenade."

"I can't believe it, Judy."

"Yes, suh, hit's de trufe. I had on de ole gray hat you done throw away, an' I was a-stoopin' a-lookin' through de bushes kinda hid laik all but my haid, so he must have mistookken me foh you all, Captain. But he shore shot at me. I didn't heah dat fust bullet but I was laik de othah coon dey tells about. I heard de second bullet three times."

"That would be an absolute impossibility."

"Dat ability impossolute is wheah you don't make any 'lowance foh de footin' qualities of a niggah, Captain. I tell you I'se jes' 'zackly laik dat othah coon. I done heard dat second bullet when hit passed me, I heard hit ag'in when I passed hit, an' we both went through dat barn doah side by side."

Henry Clay Barker laughed heartily. "That was a retreat in splendid precision but military disordah, Judy." Then some second thought of the deviltry that had been meant caused the Southerner to say: "Well, whether the shot was by accident or design, theah is the most contemptible sneak in the Ozarks. I am sure Gilton could ac-

count foh mo' than one happenin' in these hills."

Striking the knuckles of one hand within the broad palm of the other, Captain Barker stood looking thoughtfully through the open door for a second or so, then turned to his niece.

"Brilla, gul," he said, "how would you like to take Judy and go back to the old blue-grass foh a spell? You could have a grand time, visitin' and hobnobbin' with those high an' mighty Lee cousins you have nevah met. I could rig you up in fine style, gul, when I sell the Berkshires."

Brilla shook her head hurriedly. "Oh, no, Uncle; don't ask me to do that, please. I couldn't possibly go away from heah."

"Why not, gul? You don't look any too well lately. The change would be just the thing."

The girl's face had become very grave, and it was with difficulty that she controlled the quiver of her lips as she replied, "Uncle, do you evah stop to think my fathah might retuhn and theah would be no one to receive him kindly?"

"Receive him kindly?—Lee Bawkah, the coward? Merciful Gawd!" cried the Captain, standing at his full height; then, with a half smothered oath, he abruptly left the girl's presence.

## CHAPTER XII

**B**RILLA, with her mind full of her father, drove slowly over the rocky road toward the tiny schoolhouse in Dogwood Valley. In fact, since the candy breaking at Rufe Walker's she had been obsessed by the one thought. The girl had become a dissector of human frailties and to-day she was working herself into a strong belief that the fugitive must return before long a true penitent, an honest man. Had not the greatest shadow, after all, fallen not upon her — nor her father's brother — but upon the erring one himself?

Punishment, penance, restitution, forgiveness, might restore to a degree lost self-respect, but while Memory dwells there is no obliteration. The girl realized that every moment of her deep humiliation and of her uncle's poignant grief must have been doubled,— nay, trebled,— by the remorse of the outcast. So in profound pity for the wanderer all bitterness was wiped out. She wept no more, but holding her head high industriously moved about her daily duties.

She had kept to herself what Gilton had said of his knowledge of Lee Barker's whereabouts and his threat to betray him. Brilla Barker had never entirely understood the nature of her

father's mistake. While she was a child she had thought him dead; but, with the cruelty of heedless youth, a schoolmate had given her the first rankling impression of her father's mistake and she had nerved herself to ask her uncle for information upon the subject. Never had she forgotten his haggard face, his shamed, bowed head, the despair and the pain in his words, as he had answered:

"We were sons of one mothah,—the sweetest woman ever bred in the blue-grass valleys,—and sons of one of the noblest sons of old Kentucky. For one who is a criminal by his own weakness, his own folly, I have pity; but maddening, maddening is the thought, degrading the dishonah, of knowing one's own brothah to be a coward,—one who sinned and ran away. You ah my child by process of law. You have no othah fathah and that is all you need to know. Nevah ask me to speak of him again, foh theah is nothing on Gawd's green footstool mo' despicable to me than a coward."

Afterward Brilla, by dint of great pleading, gleaned a little from Judy. The colored woman explained, as she understood it, that for two years before the birth of Jules Marzelle, and Brilla's own birth three weeks later, a wave of lawlessness had reigned in several of the Ozark counties. Cattle and horses were stolen, whiskey illegally manufactured, money boldly counterfeited and freely passed until the government through some inside information secured evidence. And in some way Brilla's father was implicated.

Judy told Brilla that Judge Barton had once tried to trace Lee Barker's connection with the law breakers, but he could find nothing more than the barest suspicion of guilty knowledge, so that the real cause of her father's flight was a mystery. He went away between two suns, leaving a note to his wife and his brother asking to be considered as one dead, nothing more.

The girl was pondering over all these things when she was suddenly aroused by the rapid loping of a horse behind her. She felt her breath coming fast, dreading another meeting with Gilton; but it was Jules Marzelle who rode up beside her.

"Jules," said she in relief that was almost pathetic, "I am so glad it is you."

"Well, that's certainly nice of you, Brilla." He leaned low from the saddle, longing to sweep her into his arms and cover her trembling lips with kisses. But his voice was calm as he asked, "Who did you think it was?"

"I was afraid it might be my miserable tormentah."

"Gilton?"

The girl nodded.

"You need not worry about that, Brilla. The Judge, Rufe Walker, Lib Clevinger, and I gave him full warning the other night that if he ever molested you again by word or act we would have it out with him for good and all. He won't repeat the offense. He's only an ignorant, cringing coward."

"He is ignorant in many ways, Jules, but in many othahs he is very cunning. He certainly hates us both for some reason, and you will have to watch him in youh campaign. But thank you foh youh kindly protection, Jules." Brilla colored suddenly as the tender word at the candy-breaking came to her, and she went on hurriedly, "How is the treacherous political world treating you by now?"

"I've certainly gone in to win, Brilla. I've felt that you, like the Little Mother and the Judge, have been vexed with me for yielding to the temptation. I'm sorry we can't all see alike, but you wish me good luck, don't you, girlie?" Jules bent again toward her.

"If you have made up youh mind to go ahead, you certainly have my very best wishes; but I have discovered one thing."

"What's that, Brilla?"

"That with so many othah good qualities, you ah the hardest-headed, stubbornest young man in the whole country."

"Now, little playmate, don't misjudge me. I've something to tell you after the nomination. I'm quite afraid it won't keep that long either, although the time is short."

Jules' eyes shone with such unusual brilliance, his words were so full of wistful tenderness and half-spoken yearning, that Brilla Barker, listening, half-fascinated and spellbound, was very silent.

As the girl continued to hold her peace the

man's figure began to droop, and he felt a pang of indescribable fear. He reached up and pulled his hat well down over his eyes to hide the bitterness that had come to him. He flinched at the thought that intruded again,—the thought of some deep, great gap, some barrier between himself and the girl by his side. It was as the chill of an icy blast fanning out the tender light of other days.

Glancing sideways at her companion, Brilla was amazed at the swift change in his expression, and the taunt of Gilton that Jules expected to finish his life away from the hills rushed upon her. Fearing that his sudden silence was a confusion born of regret for words she might misunderstand, the girl, in the courage of self-respect, nervously commenced to speak of other things.

"Jules, you ah to speak at the schoolhouse upon the last day, ah you not? According to programme we ah to have the school exercises first and the patriotic and political speaking aftahward. I am told the whole country is coming, from Bawkah's Bluff to Horse Shoe Bend, and from Beavah to Tawneyville. The speaking is to be out in the grove, and I do so hope it won't rain."

Jules rode on in silence. After a short time Brilla repeated the question, "Ah you going to speak, Jules?"

"Yes, I believe so. Is the gentleman from New York stopping at your house now?" He asked the question as if expecting a rebuke, but

the girl, without turning her head, answered calmly:

"Oh, no; he is still staying at Rufe Walkah's."

"How long is he to be around here; do you know?"

"Indeed I don't; but I rathah think all the summah."

"Has he been over to your house often?"

"Why, yes,—several times," replied the girl gently.

"Several times?" Jules Marzelle's voice betrayed unmistakable surprise. "For a stranger, he calls very frequently, I think."

"Uncle does not considah him quite a strangah, Jules. You know we spring from a hospitable, kind-hearted race, and my uncle says, since it might have been a bullet from his own rifle that deprived Mr. Hamilton of his grandsiah, theah is nothing he would not do foh him."

Marzelle answered briefly, "So it seems."

The girl was puzzled at the trend of the conversation, but she went on softly: "Mr. Hamilton has very couhteously made no demand upon my time or hospitality. He has been the Captain's guest altogethah, but, from what he has said, I know he is as anxious as any one to see you win."

The gentleness of the words made Jules quite ashamed of his questions; but something, he knew not what, irritated him, and he replied: "The gentleman can spare himself any solicitation upon my account. Whether I win or lose, his world



and mine are as far apart as the earth and the sun. He is of the idle rich; I am of the plodding poor."

"Jules Mahzelle, that is quite unworthy of you. How do you know how full any man's life may be, or how busy?"

The young man made no answer. The pair rode on in strained silence for a mile at least before Jules spoke. Then he said quietly: "Forgive me, please. I'm not myself to-day. I've been hoping, thinking, vague things. My words have not been the words of a gentleman. I'm sorry."

"Theah is nothing to fohgive, old friend." Brilla reached out her hand and dropped it daintily into his. "I'm afraid none of us are thoroughbreds every minute." She looked at him with eyes clear and thoughtful, then she continued: "Jules, I hope for you that this is Opportunity, and that whatevah aspirations you have may be gratified in every way you would wish. Being a woman, I do not know much of such things; but I should like to claim a friend's privilege in giving you a bit of advice. Everything seems to point not only to the nomination but to youh election as well. Perhaps you ah destined to play a great part in the future — some must evah lead and othahs follow — but don't make the mistake of permitting Ambition to become youh God. Youh life with us has been open and clean. Keep it so, won't you, Jules, no mattah what comes youh

way? Perhaps youh feet must stumble into snares, but be as upright in the world as you have been in ouh hills. Fight if you must fight, but let it be a good fight; and, Jules, keep the faith always,— the faith of youh manhood."

A serious melancholy shaded the girl's face. The man gazed at her, studying her wonderingly. Never before had he heard her speak so earnestly, and with such depth of feeling. The understrain of sadness in her last words brought to his lips a serious, solemn response.

"I promise you, little playmate, I will make a good fight. I intend to do my best in any position in which I may be placed in life. I know I'll have to work hard, to struggle, but I shall always bear in mind that my father has left to me, not wealth, but that greatest of all legacies,— an honorable name to sustain." His companion shivered, paling visibly. "Forgive me, Brilla. I did not say that to open any old wound of yours. I simply wanted you to see into my heart. Our roads separate, and I must say good-bye. In a few days I hope you may congratulate me upon the nomination, Brilla."

Jules' boastful pride of an honorable name had left the girl sick with apprehension, but she forced a smile as she answered: "Good-bye, Jules. Don't forget that speech at the schoolhouse: make it a great one, boy, and when Fortune beckons and Success stands at youh threshold be true to youhself and don't forget the promise."

She looked steadfastly into the hazel of his eyes, from which the traces of the recent storm had passed. The young man removed his hat, holding it for a moment; then he said: "Oh, it's great to go into a race to win,— it's fine to have to struggle, to push, to forge, and then come out ahead. My ancestors must have been men of action, since it seems to me that the ambitions of generations are imprisoned within me, beating against the bars, clamoring for release. But never fear, little comrade, I'll keep the promise and, God willing, I'll keep the faith."

Brilla was suddenly aware of a change in the man before her. Already he bore himself differently, with more authority, as one conscious of a new strength, while the atmosphere of opportunity, the chance of a lifetime, hung about him. A great fear for his future gave added weight to the heavy hand that seemed, even now, to be gripping her very soul.

## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HE piebald pony followed the road that led down to the schoolhouse in the valley. The high-stepping mare,—bearing her lithesome rider, whose late wound was for the time forgotten in the sweep of the ambitions that were luring him into new joy,—cantered briskly up the gradually ascending trail that led over Pine Ridge.

Horse and rider had barely passed from sight, obscured by the dense growth of scrub oak and pine, when Brilla espied a man coming down the pebbly road on foot. It was Pike Hamilton, whistling as he walked, his face raised to the sun, the beauty of the day in his eyes, the song of a bird upon his lips. With courtliness he bared his head as he caught sight of the girl some fifty yards away.

“Greeting — greetings. ‘The lucky beggar meets the fair princess in her royal coach upon the highway,’ as my story book used to say, Miss Barker.”

“Or rathah, ‘The idle prince meets the beggar maid in her ramshackle cart upon the valley’s rim,’ as my story book would say.” There was no trace of shyness in the girl’s speech. “But wheah, may I ask, ah you going on foot, suh?”

" 'Just rambling,' as the song says. I've been exploring that queer ravine back there. You know I'm something of a lithologist and I find the character and the science of the stones most interesting. I have seen some wonderful lithotomes about, too."

" Pahdon a country girl's ignorance, but just what ah lithotomes, Mr. Hamilton? "

" They are stones formed naturally but having the appearance of being cut artificially or by hand."

" Oh, then," answered the girl, " you must not fail to see ouh beautiful Mahble Cave. Uncle Bawkah has a hobby foh caves. Maybe we can take you theah."

" You must.— But, Miss Brilla, I'm dreadfully tired; is there not room for two in the royal chariot? "

The wild rose tint grew deeper in the girl's cheeks as she replied, " Ah you suah I am going youh way, suh? "

" Perfectly sure, since the beggar is never a chooser,— not even of his road, princess."

" I'll give you a lift, as we say heah in the backwoods." The girl smiled as she moved to make room. " I can't promise you a very exciting ride, howevah, as the pony is Pokey by name and pokey by nature."

" I think she's a dear little beast," said the man.

Brilla pushed aside the skirt of her dress,— a plain blue chambray, with tiny insets of white em-

broidery about the yoke and belt. A very simple little dress it was, but the girl's love of her needle and her inherited pride of appearance, together with Aunt Judith's skill as a laundress, made the school-teacher's dresses and bonnets the envy and the despair of every hill woman from the mouth of the "Jeems" to Panther.

While the couple talked of nothings the man studied the girl with frank admiration, noting the roundness and the symmetry of her arms, the shapeliness of her wrists and of her fingers as they guided the reins. He was quite surprised and delighted to find the young woman so serene. As he felt the brush of her slender shoulder he was consciously thrilled by her nearness and by her sweet companionship; and he found himself inwardly blessing the fate that had led him out of the gorge onto the high road at the fitting moment.

Through a clearing, high upon the crest of the ridge, Jules Marzelle looked down into the valley. The same mysterious Fate that had guided the stranger's steps out of the ravine so opportunely timed the young lawyer's glance to the very second that the man of leisure climbed in beside Brilla Barker.

Savagely Jules pulled his animal to a standstill, training his eyes carefully upon the vehicle below. Then, satisfied that no delusion assailed his vision, he struck the black mare a stinging blow upon the flank and dashed rapidly ahead, with chin flexed

and unfamiliar lines about his tense mouth, wholly oblivious of the fact that the scene just witnessed had been provocative of the very first profanity that had ever passed his lips.

As Pokey resumed the interrupted journey Hamilton began to beg pardon for his intrusion. "Please, Miss Brilla, don't think me altogether ill-mannered and presumptuous. I particularly wished to show you some writing I picked up this morning in my wanderings. It sounds strange; yet I can make nothing of it."

"You wouldn't apologize in the least if you knew how anxious I have been to meet you and explain how Judy combs ouh pies."

A mischievous twinkle of her violet eyes, a turning away to hide a lurking smile, caused Hamilton to answer quickly, "Oh, Miss Brilla, I knew it was a joke."

"But Judy said you turned pale and sick."

"Come, Miss Brilla, I'll admit I was astonished for the moment, but the Captain explained later. And do you know I had about decided that the quality of Judy's pies excused any sort of a breach of etiquette or sanitation in the making. Please tell your good cook she owes me another 'combed' dinner, and now may I show you the letter?"

Hamilton produced the unsigned page of a neatly written letter. Giving the reins into his hand Brilla took the manuscript, and read:

"See B. at once and get the whole story from him in some way. You can learn, for certain, if any further evidence has

been unearthed. For your trouble you will find twenty-five dollars enclosed. Get all the information you can, and if things are still the same, I am coming back at once. In pity make it safe for me to return, and you may have the secret of the lead. I do not care for it. My health is broken,—time has been an eternity, the suspense unbearable. I have but one desire left,—the sight of those I love.”

At the last word the page fluttered from Brilla’s hand. Her face was drawn and set, and the expression in her eyes as she raised them pleadingly to the man’s was haunted and terrified.

“Here, lean upon me. You are ill. What is the matter, Miss Brilla,—what is it?” For the life of her Brilla Barker could not utter a sound. The road seemed to rise up to meet her, the trees seemed to bend, a diffused blur shut out the sunlight, and a voice that sounded miles away was saying: “Don’t faint. Brace up, please brace up.”

She thought she was seated again upon the old garden bench beneath the big cherry tree and that it was Jules who leaned over her. When her eyes opened wide the vehicle was at a standstill, and Brilla Barker felt herself resting against the breast of the stranger. One strong arm was about her while he fanned her with his hat.

“What is it, Miss Brilla,—what happened?”

“If I tell you, Mr. Hamilton, you will respect the confidence?”

“Indeed, I shall,” said the man earnestly.

“That is part of a message,—a message for help,—to some one here in the hills from my



fathah, suh,— the fathah I have nevah known.”

She leaned forward, with bent head, her voice trailing off in a quivering sob, but only for a moment. Then pride and the heritage of good blood came quickly to the rescue. She sat proudly erect, lifting her chin, trying hard to overcome the pain that had moved her so, and endeavoring at once to excuse and to explain her agitation.

“Fancy a hill girl fainting. It was evah so silly of me — of me to give up like that, suh. You see my fathah — my fathah once made a mistake, suh. He once stepped aside upon life’s tangled pathway, as many have done befo’ him. Perhaps he was guilty of much wrong,— perhaps he was not. Who can say? I only know that he lost the way once. He had been convicted without trial in the minds of some of ouh people, while he has nevah sought a chance to clean the slate, suh. I can only say that you can see for youhself how much he regrets it,— how he longs to come home. And oh, I do want to help him! — I must help my own fathah, Mr. Hamilton.”

The man’s heart ached for the gentle creature caught in the pitiless turn of an overwhelming tide. He raised her hand to his lips.

“You are the bravest girl I have ever known. I am more than proud to know you, Brilla.” The name slipped easily from his tongue. “If you and your father need help I am yours to command. Only tell me how I may best serve you.”

Brilla’s fingers lingered a moment in his, then

were slowly withdrawn as she replied in a voice as gentle as the whispering of night through the wild moonvine:

"Thank you, suh. Please let me have the bit of writing and say nothing to any one about it. If the time does come when I need help, gladly and thankfully will I accept youh heavenly generosity, suh. I cannot inflict my troubles upon any one now. I must think things out as best I can, but I can truly say, suh, I have learned in this houh the real meaning of friendship."

"Well now let me drive you to the schoolhouse at any rate. Won't you lean upon me and rest?" The man regarded the girl anxiously, for it was indeed quite plain to be seen that at last the burden had gone quite beyond the bearing.

As they traveled silently down through the valley the world that Pike Hamilton had left behind him seemed to him of trifling worth, and in the moment he found himself despising it, as the charm of the slurring voice, the touch of the slender body he had just held within his arms, the warm breath upon his neck, the slim, tiny fingers he had just kissed, began to forge a chain of slavery about him.

He had known women gorgeously alluring, women whose love could live only as the short-lived, brilliantly flashing meteor of a night. But here was one of delightful innocence and naïveté, and at the same time one capable of great sacrifice and devotion,—one whom God had indeed

"made beautiful within," the mistress of a love that once bestowed could never pall upon a man,— a love that would burn with the calm, steady glow of a blessed taper upon the domestic altar, shedding its gleaming radiance, its tender warmth, like a beacon of hope unto the end.

To Hamilton the girl at his side was no ideal of a dream, no imperious goddess, but a fellow-creature, trusting, tremulous, suffering, and human; and as he thought of her, so proud and yet so clean of soul, he whispered within his own heart: "And let thine eyes the good behold — in everything save sin."

## CHAPTER XIV

**T**HE thought of Jules Marzelle's entering a political race, with the mystery of his birth hanging over him, harried Robert Barton until it became to him a grievous oppression. When he could stand the thought no longer he sought the boy's mother.

Hallie Marzelle, meeting him at her door alone,—his face serious, shadowy, and drawn as she had seen it before, with deep circles beneath his troubled gray eyes,—knew full well that it was a time of crisis. The hand that offered the visitor a chair trembled visibly.

"Jules is not at home?" inquired Barton of the agitated woman.

"No, he has been in Hillston since yesterday. They have the nominating convention there to-day, do they not?"

"Yes, I am on my way there now. Hallie, forgive what I am about to ask, but I can stand the uncertainty no longer. Have you ever told your son the story of his birth?"

The woman started, then loosening the collar band of her dress, answered quietly and low, "No; I have never told him, Robert."

"Why not, Hallie? Do you not think it un-

fair to permit him to enter a political fight ignorant of a weapon in the hands of the unscrupulous; do you think it just to send him unprepared into a race against men, who perhaps even now are preparing the net of treacherous exposure for his unsuspecting feet? "

Hallie's hazel eyes changed into pools of angry light as they rested on the speaker, the softened lines of her face hardened, the whole woman woke into a storm of resentful passion.

"No, I have not told him; and I am not ashamed to say I have kept it from him purposely. Whenever he learns, will it not be soon enough? Why should I darken his life with the lie that has crushed mine and made of it a hideous living nightmare? No. Of whatever sins I stand charged before the bar of Eternity, I shall at least not answer guilty to adding one cloud to the days of his childhood or of robbing his youth of one single joyous moment. And again I say no — positively no. My son knows nothing of his mother's sorrow, his mother's fight."

"I am not reproaching you, Hallie," the Judge said in a voice as low and gentle as that of a woman; "but there is no doubt that you have made a mistake. Jules should have been told by you. Until recently I thought he knew."

"I intended to tell him, Robert, when love should enter into his life, and you know we have always dreamt, you and I, that the woman would be Brilla. Perhaps I have been mistaken, blind

and deaf, but how could I ever have a suspicion of this political call? How could you expect a poor ignorant, bruised worm to understand your man's world? "

"Hallie, I would spare you if I could; but you must tell the boy the story,—must tell him at once; whether the nomination be lost or won. Do not risk it longer,—do not keep it from him. The boy is a man, and he is standing now where silence on your part is a crime. Tell him."

Robert Barton,—who had listened to many piteous pleas from wretched felons, a man whose sworn duty once required him to pronounce unflinchingly life sentence upon a white-faced, bright-eyed transgressor, whose soft curls clustered about a forehead as fair as one of Raphael's angels,—could have cried out in anguish now as the woman he loved received from him a blow that she sought to hide by that pitiful dumbness that seeks to hide misery. Tearless she stood, with eyes wide, staring, and frightened, supporting herself weakly with one hand.

Again the Judge spoke.

"Hallie, somehow words do not come easy to-day, but if by the giving of my life I could spare you one added grief, I would gladly give it. Believe me, the time has come for you to act. You must tell Jules all and at once. Promise me that you will, Hallie? "

The face of the mother as she sank into a chair was very wan and tired. From out the silence

came crowding the ghosts of the Past: Memory, — Love, — Joy, — Tenderness, — and once again Fear, — vibrant, black, stinging, hideous, unrelenting Fear.

Bob Barton turned away. Walking to the door he looked out upon the fairness of the day, its gleaming, sparkling radiance in strange contrast to the dreariness within. Was it more than twenty years since Hallie was a slip of a girl and he himself stepping out into a happy world, a boyish weaver of dreams, — dreams that the girl had just begun to hold together like a song when Doctor Jules entered? After that — how fast the days lost color; the glamour of the love-starred skies faded, and romance changed into a serious, patient friendship that was half worship, half melancholy. The sweep of these empty years was upon him now, the hollow mockery of a destiny more cruel than death searing his soul, buffeting him, as it had the woman he had loved with the all absorbing love of youth. He turned and looked toward her.

"Tell me, Hallie: What is your decision?"

"I promise to tell him, Robert."

"When? To-morrow?"

"I cannot say just when. As soon as I can nerve myself to do it. As soon as He who fits the back to the burden will give me the strength I so sorely need."

Humbly and contritely the big man held out his hand and said, "And you forgive me, Hallie?"

“Forgive you? Why, what have you ever done, you dear faithful, abused friend, to require forgiveness? God bless you.” She looked up at him, piteously bewildered as a child groping in the dark. “Robert,—Robert,—stand by my boy. He is, as you say, a man now, out in the heat of the fray, out upon the firing line. He will need some one, Robert, while I—I,—his mother,—hide my head, conceal the wound, and suffer on—on as in the past, alone—alone.”



## CHAPTER XV

**I**T was a fortnight after the finding of the mysterious letter. The white painted school-house in Dogwood Valley was the scene of one of the largest gatherings the old Knobs had ever looked down upon within the recollection of the oldest settler. A programme of the school exercises and the speaking had been widely advertised through the columns of the *Ozarkian*, the *Meadville Eagle*, the *Barkersville Clarion*, *Ryeland's Weekly Venture*, the *Ridge City Call*, and other dispensers of the news throughout the district.

A platform, erected in the grove, was gay with streamers of bunting, while the stars and stripes floated in the mountain breezes over the speaker's table and the cottage organ. A full account of the candy-breaking had spread throughout the Knobs, and many had come from a long distance with the cherished hope of hearing "that tip-top fiddler from New Yawk cut off a strip."

Brilla Barker, low-spirited and vaguely troubled, had received the news of Jules' nomination with a lack of interest and enthusiasm that was more than surprising to her worthy kinsman, the Captain. The letter, however, had made the girl's days a living torture and each night a thou-

sand terrors. The breeze playing through the pines, the howl of a distant wolf, the hoot of a near-by owl, the bark of her fox-terrier, caught her wide-eyed and alert peering out here, there, and everywhere at all hours, fully expecting to see the strange form of her father lurking about.

Now and then thoughts of Marzelle or Hamilton came to her, but she made no attempt to contrast the two or to analyze her feelings for either of them. The secret of the letter had established something of a bond, a friendly intimacy, between herself and the stranger.

Heretofore all the trials that had come to her had affected her happiness to no serious extent, but now she was absorbed in the one burning thought,—her father. Every nerve in her slender body was tensely alive, strung up to the single idea, "He suffers and he needs me."

Pike Hamilton was at the schoolhouse early. For the children he had generously ordered sent down into the hills from Springfield many boxes of lemons and large quantities of ice, with cakes and wafers of every tempting variety; and he expected to superintend the treat in person. The weary driver who pulled in with the load,—driven over night that the long haul might not bring about too large a waste of the carefully packed ice,—was ever after convinced that he had had within his reach the proverbial pot of gold at the rainbow's end when Hamilton had tendered him a one hundred dollar bill for his trouble.

The teacher's cheeks were very pink, her eyes deep purpling lakes, as she moved here and there among the growing throng, the sunlight flickering through the trees upon her crinkly hair and white dress. To Hamilton she was more beautiful than ever. In truth the rare charm of the girl went to the man's head a bit.

Jules Marzelle, arriving with his mother, was immediately overwhelmed by the warm congratulations of his friends and neighbors. He appeared quite merry at times, but Brilla thought she detected a shadow upon his clean-cut features. She had a strange foreboding, a premonition that would not be shaken, of breakers ahead for the now smoothly drifting barque of her old playmate. Many times she looked across the grove to where Jules was standing, the central figure of a friendly group. At length he was alone, and she beckoned him to her side.

"What's the matter, Jules?" she said. "To me you seem changed in some way, and I thought the nomination would make you so — so —"

"So what, Brilla?"

"Why, elated and satisfied. Ah you?"

"Well, yes, in a way; but somehow some things have a habit of hurting, you know."

"What things, may I ask, Jules?" inquired the girl gravely.

"Why, you have shown but small interest in my success, Brilla. The Judge is more than disappointing in his indifference, while Mother wept

like a mourner when she heard the news. And you are the three people in the whole world for whose opinions I care most." Jules stared stonily at a moss-covered twig lying at his feet. The girl moved a step nearer.

"Have I hurt you, Jules? If so, I am indeed sorry; but you don't undahstand and some things ah difficult of explanation. I have been worried about something lately and if I have seemed indifferent that alone is to blame. You know we all wish you success. Of course youh election is certain, and we shall truly miss you when you leave, but ouh loss will be the district's good luck, Jules."

Brilla smiled up at him sweetly, but Jules' voice in reply was harsh and strained.

"Whether elected or not, I have just begun to realize it will be best for me to go away. If I succeeded beyond all expectations, Brilla, you would still be as far away, as unapproachable; and if I stayed I should be hating myself for my weakness." The words rolled out grimly in spite of an effort to control them.

The teacher bit her lip, then answered with a pronounced show of spirit: "To go away? Is that a man's courage, Jules. Why, if I were a man, I'd do whatevah I set out to do. Theah would be no wavering with me,—no faltering of purpose." Brilla laughed up at him saucily with a laugh that was meant for an armistice, a peace offering. Before Jules could speak she was gone, fluttering away with a group of children, and Pike

Hamilton was standing before him with outstretched hand.

"I congratulate you, Marzelle. I'm jolly glad you won, old man. Will you let me electioneer for you?"

Marzelle searched the other's face coolly. "I thank you," he said. "I did not suppose that you would be in our hills long enough for that."

Hamilton caught an undercurrent in the words of the other and he flushed. Then understanding came to him with the thought of Brilla. Perhaps there was a promise that bound Jules and the girl.

"You are right, Marzelle," he said, "you are right. I am leaving soon,—as soon as I visit one of your neighborhood caves. And please believe me when I say that I earnestly hope to hear of your success."

"Thank you," replied Jules. The two clasped hands cordially for a second, then parted.

After all, do we see or feel life? May not one live a century in the matter of a few moments? To Hamilton the world looked drab and drear, the ridges dun and old, the increasing crowd and busy hum of conversation seemed far distant, and the mountain breezes chilled him despite the sun's warmth.

Brilla's pupils acquitted themselves admirably, and thanks to the stranger's generosity the event for the youngsters resolved itself into an ever-to-be-remembered picnic.

The new nominee was last among the speakers. As the wind stirs the leaves of the forest, first with a delicate rustling, then with a strong bending of boughs, so did Jules Marzelle sway his audience. The educated and uneducated hung upon his words. They were so simple, yet so telling.

The genuine hillsman is a Stoic,—an unemotional, undemonstrative creature, as a rule; but the grave dignity, the force, and the power of this boy brought up among them stirred the love of country, smoldering, latent as a banked fire within the narrow confines of their souls, until in answer to the beacon light there flashed back a glow that burst into one sheet of flame. The crowd went wild. Even aged men found a new power and a new use for their palsied hands. They waved their hats and lifted their hitherto quavering voices with a moment's renewal of the strength of youth — such is the love of country — while a prolonged cheering shook the ridges.

Hamilton found himself carried away by the speaker's sincerity; and he too found in the listening pleasure and profit. Instinctively he felt the lawyer's force and mastery. When the speech was over he made his way to the side of Brilla Barker.

"Do you think we could arrange the trip to the cave soon, Miss Brilla?" The request was made in a voice purposely low. "I find I must be leaving the hills in a few days," he added.

Brilla did not speak nor stir for a second.

Then she replied helplessly: "Oh, I had so hoped that you might remain with us awhile, since no one else knows of my trouble; and perhaps you could tell me how to find him. Oh, must you go?" she pleaded piteously.

Hamilton was troubled at the girl's request. He was half tempted to yield when the memory of Jules' face came to him.

"I am sorry, Miss Brilla, but I must leave. But perhaps I might be able to help you if you could only give me some idea of how to go about it."

"Possibly I may think of some plan very soon," she said. But underlying the words was a burden of care and hopelessness.

A committee of hillsmen, headed by Lib Clevinger as spokesman, asked Hamilton to do some "fiddlin'," as many of the crowd were disappointed and loath to depart until they had heard the artist whose fame had traveled over the ridges. Hamilton said that he was without an instrument, but this emergency had been forestalled by a hint to the Captain several days before. He had with him the violin that had been brought by the stranger into the Knobs.

Pike Hamilton, with the violin caressingly cuddled against his cheek, stood where Marzelle had just bowed his acknowledgment. As he glanced at the face of Brilla Barker the surroundings were forgotten, and in aching, sobbing mellowness he poured forth a renunciation. There was the mur-

mur of the mountain brook, the call of the bluebird to its mate, the majesty of the hills, the mists of the valley, the echo of a fleeting, broken idyl, the solemn sweetness of benediction, the low, lingering caress — of farewell.

And farewell it was. No amount of persuasion could induce the player to respond to the encore after he had freed the current of his memory with good-bye.

Captain Henry Clay Barker's sharp brown eyes caught the change in Hamilton's features; his trained ear detected the secret in the throb of the strings. Somehow he understood and was troubled. He found himself asking why this friend too should taste the fennel's bitter leaf,—be touched by a shadow of the hills.



## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HE crowd had dispersed. A few persons remained to remove the decorations, to put the chairs and the benches away from the wear and tear of the weather, to close the schoolhouse, and to load the teacher's organ into the wagon in waiting.

Captain Barker, Judge Barton, Marzelle, and Hamilton were standing in a little group talking over the issues of the coming campaign, while Rufe Walker and Lib Clevinger, under the guidance of Mrs. Marzelle and Brilla Barker, were doing the work of putting things in order.

Humwell Gilton with four of his followers, who had happened in just before the close of the exercises, stood idly about. When the moment for dispersal came Gilton, followed closely by his crowd,—Phil and Bill Gates, Doss Peal, and Joe Oden,—ambled slowly and gradually nearer the departing group. At length Gilton, brushing close to Marzelle, caused him to turn and ask:

“Did you wish to speak to me, Hum?”

“Why, yes; I ’lowed to ’gratulate you on the nominashun.”

“I thank you. I thought you were against me, Hum?” Jules’ voice was kindly, but he con-

tinued to gaze into the man's face, fascinated by something he read there. In spite of Gilton's expression of good-will there was in his face a darting something, of dislike or malice, seeking an outlet.

"An' say, I jes' wanted to ask," resumed Gilton, "so I could tell some of the fellers thet has asked me whut name air you 'lowin' to run under?"

The words struck sharp as a sword thrust. The Little Mother pressed both her hands to her throat.

"What name?" replied Jules. "Why, my own name, to be sure. You didn't think I intend to borrow or invent one for the occasion, did you?"

"Wal, I didn't know as to thet. I knew you didn't have any real name. You air a feller 'thout ary name, you know, Marzelle."

As her uncle, looking at Gilton wide-eyed and panting like some enraged animal, rushed between the two men Brilla Barker gave a cry of terror.

"What ah you saying, you hellion? Ah you man or devil, suh?" thundered the old soldier, scowling fiercely.

"Yes; what is your meaning, Gilton? I demand instant explanation — what are you talking about?" asked Jules.

The mother turned to her son with a moan. "Don't, son," she said. "Don't ask him what he means.— Come away; I'll tell you."

Bob Barton laid a restraining hand on the woman's arm, knowing full well by her words, her look of horror, that the story as yet had not passed her lips. His own face was resolute and set as he said:

"No; let's have it now, since it must come sooner or later. Out with it, Gilton. Get the load off of your dirty heart. I'll allow you the satisfaction of telling it; then I'll have the satisfaction I told you I'd take when you cross-examined me."

Hamilton started. Was this a link in the chain? Was the B. B. of the mysterious letter the Judge? Was Gilton the one who got the story? He wondered as he sought to catch her eye if Brilla Barker had observed the significance.

Gilton backed off. Marzelle, paralyzed for the moment, stared at him. As the distance lengthened between them, Jules awoke to the full import of the man's words. He sprang at his throat, leaping the space that intervened like some infuriated tiger. A black rage gripped him from head to foot, and the combined efforts of Gilton's friends and his own were barely sufficient to release the strangle hold his fingers had upon the throat of the one he had pinioned to the earth.

Gilton rose to his feet, breathing heavily, still defiant, while the burning eyes of Marzelle never for an instant left his face.

At length Jules turned to his friend. "Tell me, Judge Barton. What is this son of perdition insinuating?"

Sneering and derisive, Gilton answered in a croaking wheeze:

"Jes' whut I says. You hain't got any more name under the law than a houn' pup."

The Judge tightened his clutch upon Jules, who struggled desperately for release. "Let me get at him, Judge. Let me. If he does not swallow the lie, I'll —"

"Ask your Mammy there ef hit's a lie," interrupted the merciless persecutor. The taunting words cut the air like the whiz of so many poisoned arrows.

Brilla Barker stood with every nerve and muscle taut as her own shame of the candy-breaking returned. She lived the dark, miserable moment over again in the agony of the Mother and her son, who, like herself, were outcasts in sorrow. She placed a protecting arm about the woman so fearfully alone, gazing pityingly at the face of her old playmate whom Fate seemed bent upon crucifying.

At Gilton's words the boy turned and looked at his mother. Her eyes were praying,—praying hard. In a second he stood over her.

"In Heaven's name, Mother, what does this mean? Can't you tell the scoundrel he lies?"

Speechless, the woman writhed in agony.

## CHAPTER XIX

**T**HROUGH the clefts in the hills the gold of the coming morning dappled the gray of the departing night. As Captain Henry Clay had business that called him to Ridge City that day, he followed the usual custom of the hills, where roads are rough and distances great, in getting an early start.

This gave to Brilla the opportunity to reach her father's side shortly after sunrise. She was followed very soon by Judy, who brought an appetizing breakfast for Hamilton.

"Mr. Hamilton," Brilla said, "Uncle cannot be home before sunset, and since Prince is idle to-day you must use him to return to Rufe's. He is saddled, waiting for you in his stall. Please make use of him. My uncle would not mind in the least, even should he discover it."

He took advantage of the offer and returned for the day to the home of Rufe Walker, who was beginning to grow uneasy over his guest's absence. Hamilton explained that he had found an interesting spot upon the creek to which he intended to return for a camping out of several days after he had refreshed himself with a few hours' sleep. This explanation was accepted without challenge by his host.

To make things more comfortable for the sick man and his nurse, everything that could be spared from the home without attracting the attention of the Captain was carried by the negro woman to the hut on the creek.

Hamilton, returning shortly before sundown, was surprised at the change wrought in the interior of the barren log room. The willing hands of Brilla and the tireless feet of Judy, who had made trip after trip between the homestead and the cabin, had been the means of transforming the destitute spot into a neat, sanitary resting place. Judy, with the strength of a lioness, had lifted Lee Barker to a comfortable cot; she had also removed his heavy clothes and substituted for them a nightshirt.

The floor had been well scrubbed with lye by Judy. A couple of chairs, a rocker, and a small table had made their appearance, together with several rag rugs and a lamp. Hamilton marveled at the energy and the industry that had accomplished so much within such a short time. The stricken man had been bathed at intervals during the day and forced to accept broth. Notwithstanding the improvement in the pulse and the appearance of the patient, Hamilton was not satisfied. He was eager to have a physician called without further delay, but Brilla, tearful of her father's secret, would not hear of a stranger's entering.

"No," she said; "we shall do everything

within ouh powah foh him to-day and to-morrow. Then if no change takes place, I shall call Doctor Matthis ovah from Bawkahsville and exact a promise of secrecy from him. If he agrees to protect him until he is strongah he may come. O God, be merciful to us and spare my deah daddy! "

As she knelt by the cot that contained the piece of human driftwood and began softly to pray, Pike Hamilton left the room, fearing to gaze with profane eyes upon the sweet, innocent face reflecting such wondrous faith.

Presently she arose from her knees, and called to Hamilton to come in. " You will find the lamp and the matches on the stand," she said. " I have put a heavy curtain ovah the window. Won't you please keep it down when the lamp is lighted so that no one would be attracted heah? Oh, how shamefully we ah imposing upon you, suh! "

Her voice was full of trouble.

Hamilton made haste to answer: " My dear child, how I wish I might make you understand the pleasure it would give me to serve you. This night-watching is nothing for a big, idle hulk like me. Don't let that trouble you for an instant. Nothing counts but to get your father well so that he may know you and talk with you. Don't you think you had better go? You have had a hard day of it."

" Yes," she replied slowly; " perhaps I had. Tell me first, do you think it would be very wrong

to tell a lie, one that could hurt no one but yourself?" She looked up at him, her violet eyes bewildered and vaguely troubled.

"Well, I cannot say that I admire a lie in any form, and I could not answer without knowing something of the lie itself."

"To-morrow," answered the girl, "I must tell the first lie I have evah told in all my life, and I am afraid, foh a lie is poison — no good evah came of one. Poor Jules and his mothah ah the innocent victims of a lie on the part of some one who would have been more kind had they plunged a sword into them long ago."

"May I ask what you are contemplating?" inquired Hamilton, looking at Brilla's troubled face.

The color rose in a quick tide under the clear pallor of her skin, mounting from her throat to her temples. "To-morrow, suh, I intend to tell my Uncle Bawkah I am going to stay all night with Docia McPherson, but I am coming heah instead."

The man gave a breath of relief. "Great Scot, Miss Brilla, that's hardly an unpardonable sin. Don't feel criminal over a thing as little as that. But why need you come at all? I promise you there shall be nothing left undone."

"I know it, and I have the utmost confidence in youh willing kindness, suh. But I cannot sleep, and my place is heah by his side. The Captain is so deadly and unreasonable in his angah toward



his brothah that I am afraid to tell him yet. But I expect to as soon as my fathah can be moved. No mattah what he has done he deserves bettah treatment and shall not be left lying like a dog in a desolate, tumble-down hovel like this."

The underlying passion in her voice caused Hamilton to say to himself, "The good old Southern blood again." Then he gently touched her arm. "Go home now, Miss Brilla," he said. "I am hoping for the best by to-morrow. Everything will work out right. Don't worry."

Brilla pressed her lips to her father's forehead. Walking to the door, beside which her new friend stood, she extended her hand. Hamilton raised it to his lips, pressed a tender kiss upon the slim fingers, then released it.

"Oh, thank you foh all this kindness to me, suh." Brilla stood silent, trying to overcome her weakness. Then wiping the tears that would come, she continued:

"In that covered basket you will find a lunch of bread, fried chicken, and peach preserves, which Judith insisted upon preparing. You probably will not relish it much, but I will be heah with a warm breakfast just as soon as possible. Please force my fathah to take his medicine, won't you?"

"Yes, I will. But my watch says it is away past your supper time now. You ought not to linger."

As the girl made her way through the gather-

ing dusk Hamilton watched her out of sight with a sigh, questioning why one with soul so pure and unstained, whose life by every right should be free from brier and tangle, must walk within the shadow of another's sin.

He turned back to his duties, realizing that he was not only beginning to love the hill lass, but that because of his love he could be all the more a loyal friend, capable of any sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XX

**J**ULES MARZELLE had plunged into the campaign with all the diplomacy of a battle-scarred politician. With the Judge he still maintained an attitude of cynicism,—an attitude that would have made him in the eyes of his old friend a traitor, a player with principles, had it not been for Bob Barton's power to read between the lines of human character. The boy felt that Fate had tricked him. He started out with the avowed purpose of retaliation; he had entered the fight to turn the tables and trick Fate if possible.

Robert Barton was more than troubled. This young man with a natural gift for leading was himself in need of a check rein,—of some one or some thing to keep him from entering into the game of hide and seek with truth. How to save him from himself, to turn aside his craft from the treacherous sea into which it seemed drifting, was the knottiest and most serious problem that had ever confronted the Judge. He realized that the chastening influence of Brilla could reveal the boy to himself in his true light; but Jules had given her up and had deliberately avoided her since the vertebrae of his pride had been broken.

With the blindness of love he had mistaken the

impulsive reproof at the schoolhouse for contemptuous scorn, and he was firm in the thought that Hamilton, the stranger, was winning first place. The flame of Marzelle's lofty ideals continued to flicker and burn low. The Judge, pitying him, remained in his company as much as possible.

Upon the third day after the finding of Lee Barker in the deserted cabin on the creek the Judge and Jules were closeted in the former's office in Barkersville, going over the future conduct of the campaign. The Judge had decided to help Jules in every way that he could. They were outlining a series of speeches when Lote Siddons, the sheriff of the county, entered.

"Mornin', gentlemen, mornin'. I'm in a peck of trouble. I've got a sudden call away over to the far edge of the county whar they say some trappers are having a spell of trouble with the homesteaders over thar. Sam Witherspoon, the only deputy I've got, is down sick with rheumatiz. I've got Leach, that crazy feller that killed his wife, in the jail. Some one of the crowd down below thar suggested that since you are in town, Marzelle, we might break you into office-holding by deputizing you and leaving you in charge. I'll be back to-morrow morning. What do you say, boy? Will you do it for me? It will save me a whole lot of worryin' an' runnin' about?"

Marzelle laughed heartily. It was the first

merry, old-time laugh the Judge had heard from the boy since the revelation at the schoolhouse.

In answer to the unexpected request Jules said: "Why, I don't mind, Lote, although I'm not especially anxious for the position of looking after demented people. I would not spend a night inside of that dirty, dingy jail for the best farm in the county, but I could sit out on the porch. To be sure, if it will accommodate you, Lote, I'll accept the greatness thrust upon me."

"Thank you, Jules. I'll not forget it. Gentlemen, this is about the queerest call I ever got. A feller I never laid eyes on before that I know of rode in at break-neck speed awhile ago with a note from Willows Creek. The darn note ain't even signed, an' the feller that brought it wheeled aroun' ag'in an' rode off 'thout saying 'Turkey.' I just feel in my bones that it will turn out a wild goose chase, but I've got to go, I reckon."

The sheriff was relieved when Jules consented to serve.

"I'll have to deputize you right away, Jules," he said, "so I kin get an early start. It's a hard ride to The Willows."

"Very well; I'll be down directly to be sworn, Sheriff."

Judge Barton turned to the young lawyer as Siddons left the room and said, with a smile: "What a tumble, Jules! From a prospective

seat among the mighty to turnkey of a country jail."

The younger man laughed futilely. The Judge noticed for the first time the dull gray shadows beneath his eyes as he replied: "Why, I'm getting used to tumbles, old friend. What in the mischief does it matter, just so it means work, something to think about? I've no name,—no honor.—I can never have a wife—nor a child like other men,—so I've made work my destiny. A career,—a ladder to climb to the topmost round,—while all the while my heart starves for the things that can never be mine."

The Judge trembled. "Lad, you are running away again. I cannot blame you, for I understand too well. No one can love and laugh within a shadow. But the things you are fleeing from are the only things worth while, and you cannot reach them without weathering a few storms. Why, even the Chinese, whom we call heathen, have an inscription in their Temple of Everlasting Harmony which says, 'A gem is not polished without rubbing, nor a man perfected without trials.'"

But the eyes that were in the habit of looking bravely unafraid and unashamed into the future were lonely, hungry, and wistful as the boy arose. Bob Barton went on:

"Lad, some day you will learn that a conquering of yourself will bring to you the precious things you are so ready now in the impulsive, ar-

rogant, stubborn pride of youth to cast from you. Take my advice. Work and wait as I have done."

Jules made no other reply than to say: "Lote is expecting me. I guess I'll go and be sworn to uphold the mighty arm of the law."

In a quarter of an hour the Sheriff of Taney could be seen on his horse in a hard gallop, leaving Barkersville behind as he made for the river ferry, while Jules Marzelle jangled the big key to the iron door of the rickety old square prison that contained his half-witted charge and laughed jokingly about the wonderful new official responsibility so unexpectedly thrust upon him.

## CHAPTER XXI

**A**NOTHER day was done. Brilla Barker had left her home, ostensibly to spend the night with her girl friend upon the Mink. After a roundabout drive in the old phaeton she turned the pony's head toward the forlorn cabin just as the last golden shafts of the sinking sun quivered upon the hill tops.

Once upon the lonely way she thought she detected the skulking form of a man pushing through the woods, but as her dog made no sound she put the fear aside. She drove the vehicle very close to the east side of the cabin, where the shadows of night would be more dense, and she unhitched in such a way as to leave a tiny stall for the pony between the house and the carriage.

As Hamilton stepped to her assistance she explained:

"You see I had to leave home with my pony, or Uncle might have questioned me. I am making a dark corner for her here, where she will be hard to detect if passers-by come near."

"No one will be about here, you may rest assured. Rufe says this old hut is haunted. If so the 'hant' is on leave of absence, for I have made acquaintance with nothing more uncanny than a bat."



"How is my fathah? You think he is bettah, don't you? Oh, please say he is, Mr. Hamilton."

"I wish I could say so, Miss Brilla," answered Hamilton. "But to the contrary, I see little improvement."

"What shall I do?" cried Brilla. "What shall I do? I do not dare to have his presence known. If the fevah would only break and his side of the story could be heard I would not care so much, but I don't want the officahs to come yet. Let us wait until aftah to-morrow. Then if he is not improving the doctah shall be summoned, and I myself will announce the news of his presence to my Uncle Bawkah."

All night long the girl sat beside the cot listening to the broken, incoherent ramblings of a fevered brain. The light was turned quite low, but few words were spoken. At Brilla's urgent bidding Hamilton, greatly fatigued, prepared a pallet for himself, and before midnight he was wrapped in slumber.

It was about two o'clock when he was awakened by a light touch to find Brilla leaning over him. The light had been put out.

"Oh, step out quickly, please, and keep the pony quiet," she said. "There are men on horses coming down the edge of the creek, and I am so alarmed."

Hamilton stepped outside to the pony's side and stood holding her head, quieting her. He

could hear the subdued murmur of voices, the trampling of horses' feet. The sounds seemed to come from the edge of the stream, but they soon died away slowly, and again all was silent.

Brilla called to him softly. At her request he re-lighted the lamp. She was standing, white and trembling, holding the dog within her arms.

"Did you see them?" she asked.

"No, but I could hear them plainly. Who was it?"

"Oh, I am certain it must be night ridahs, suh. Foxy gave the alarm, growling so fiercely and pricking up his eahs in such a way that I knew some one was about. I grabbed him, holding him close to smothah his growls, and blew out the light. Then I peeped through the window. Right theah the moonlight fell between those alder bushes and I could see them coming down the edge of the creek. They stopped opposite the cabin down theah, but it is so dark in that spot I lost sight of them. But they were arguing about coming heah. I heard a familiar voice say: 'Come on, boys. They ah not theah.' Then they passed on. But oh, Mr. Hamilton, just as surely as you can see that glow from the lamp some one is going to suffah to-night. That used to be a wild, reckless band. They have gone back to the old ways and ah out to injure some one now."

Brilla's shoulders shook with fear. Hamilton removed the dog from her arms, gently re-

assuring her. "Perhaps there is no need to grow uneasy about it. They must have been but few in number. Maybe they are only returning from a 'possum hunt or some political caucus."

"I hope you are right. We have had nothing like it heah foh a long time, but once, when I was a tiny tad, I saw night ridahs pass. I have nevah forgotten them, and it looks — oh, it looks as if they ah out on a secret mission to-night. Those secret missions by night used to mean trouble, sometimes death, to the victims of their angah."

A stir from the sick man attracted Brilla's attention. The fever seemed to be increasing, and in her distress about her father the men at the creek were for the time forgotten.

Pike Hamilton had just looked at his watch and observed that it was half after three when the sounds of distant and rapid shots were heard. Brilla ran to the door, listened for a second, then dropped into a chair, shaken and terrified.

"What did I tell you, suh? They ah having trouble now ovah at Bawkahsville. What can it mean? What will we do if they come back heah?"

"Keep a sharp watch, and put out the light again. But I do not have any apprehension. In fact, I honestly believe we have seen the last of them. However, if they should appear I'll assume the rôle of the 'hant' and bluff them."

Hamilton took Brilla's icy hands in his own and began to chafe them gently. "Now

I shall have to ask you to brace up, Miss Brilla. You know there is nothing gained by crossing bridges before we are compelled to."

But the fears of the agitated girl were not allayed until the morning dawned fair and peaceful.

## CHAPTER XXII

**T**HE same evening after Brilla Barker left her home to take up the watch beside her father the Captain, as was his custom, busied himself counting his favorite Berkshires. Judy, bustling about her accustomed duties and thinking of her distressed young mistress, was disturbed by a light tapping at the front door. Supposing it to be the pet dog and wondering that he should have returned home, the colored woman opened the door to admit him.

To her astonishment instead of the dog it was one of Brilla's former pupils, Virgil Hawley, who stood before her, ashy-hued and visibly perturbed.

"Where is Miss Brilly?" he inquired quickly.

"Why, she ain't hyah. She won't be to home to-night, sonny. She is ovah on de Mink. W'at you all want, chile?"

The boy looked about hurriedly as if suspecting the nearness of some evil spirit. "Say, you won't give hit away, will you, if I tell you something she or'ter know? An' could you git the word to her?"

"Why, cross my haht, honey, old Judy won't give you away. What is hit?"

The boy hesitated.

"Don't you be skeered; I'll pertect you, sonny," said Judy.

"They be a gang of Gilton's men going to raid the jail at Bawkahsville to-night. Mr. Jules has been left in charge by the sheriff. They be going to take the prisoner out and hang him over on Swan, an' if Mr. Jules tries to stop them they air a-going to kill him. They air jest going to use it for a chance to shoot Mr. Jules."

The boy delivered the startling message in one breath. Seeing a look of doubt pass over the face of his listener, he began to repeat what he had said and to explain.

"I don't know how Mr. Jules comes to have the jail-keeper's place, but I promised Miss Brilly I'd watch those fellers an' if I found out they was up to anything ornery I'd let her know. Last night they was down on the Coon ag'in, an' me an' my cousin sneaked up close enough to hear what was said. We could see some of the bunch, too. They was Hum an' the Cates boys, but we couldn't git near enough to see the rest without them a-seein' us. But we heard them fix it all up. They said hit was the best chance they would ever have to git Mr. Jules. Please, I want Miss Brilly to know."

"Hit's all right, sonny. You ah a good li'l' boy, an' Judy is gwine to git word to Miss Brilly. Something will be did about it foh shore. You run along now an' don't you worry. Nobody

will evah know you told me. We'll warn Marse Jules of de dangah somehow."

The keen-eyed Captain observed the boy as he hurried away. Upon returning to the house he inquired of Judy, "What boy was that and what was his mission?"

"Dat chile? Oh, it was de Hawley boy wantin' to know if his folks could git a setting of my tuky aigs. I would reckon any loon knows hit's too late to set 'em now."

Judy hurried about her duties, with her brain working over-time as she formulated a plan of action. "I jest can't put any mo' burdens on dat po' chile's haht. I'm not gwine to git any word to her. Whatevah is to be did I'm gwine to do hit."

When Judy's duties were finished she pretended to retire early, as was her habit. But she slipped out cautiously instead to saddle and bridle the Captain's own horse, which she hitched in waiting behind the log barn.

Then she crept slowly into the house. The Captain was seated by the table with a book in his hand. "Foh de Lawd sake," she said to herself, "I wondah now is dat man gwine to be kontrary an' devilish enough to set up an' read half de night an' me jes' a-foamin' at de mouf to git dat gun outen dat settin'-room an' git away from hyah?"

The Captain soon tired of reading, and was in bed shortly after his usual retiring time. The

watchful negress waited patiently, listening carefully until the deep, regular breathing gave notice that an opportunity had arrived to leave the farm undetected.

Judy Harrison led the horse out cautiously and guided him down the road a bit from the house. She was dressed in a pair of the Captain's overalls turned half way up the legs to shorten them sufficiently for her own dumpy figure. The big old slouch hat she wore flapped in the breeze as she rode off in a gallop toward Barkersville.

The hoofs of Prince beat a sharp tattoo upon the rocky road. The horse seemed to catch the spirit of his rider. On they went like a winged arrow, past the deep quiet woods, up the ridges and down the ridges, splashing through cool brooks now and then, slowing up once to take a narrow trail. This was said to have been made in other days by the Delawares as a short cut out to the highway again, and saved a mile or more.

When horse and rider reached the big road again Judy said: "Now, don't you all let up, Prince, foh you an' me has gotta' save Marse Jules. We nevah could look ouh li'l' mistriss in de face if we didn't do jes' what she would do if she was hyah. We all is from Ole Kaintuck, Prince, an' Kentuckians nevah says, 'Surrendah.'"

As they were crossing the creek a mile below the village a voice from a dark spot upon the willow-fringed bank called, "Halt." Judy answered by ducking low upon the animal's neck,



prodding Prince with her heel, and pleading with him to move faster.

"Dat's dem, Prince. Dat's de ornery buzzards. Dey ain't got him yit, thank de Lawd. We has de skalawags bested now, ole fellah."

Not until the very edge of Barkersville was reached did she allow Prince to slacken his speed. As they moved quietly toward the jail Judy checked Prince into a slow walk and went up close to the dark side of the small square building. The new keeper, Jules, could be plainly seen sitting upon the steps of the low, covered entrance to the prison. Judith Harrison whistled softly.

Jules arose, demanding, "Who is there?"

"Marse Jules, hit's jes' me,—Judy. Won't you come hyah quick?"

Marzelle stepped to her side, speechless with amazement.

"I've come to warn you all, Marse Jules, an' to he'p save youh life. Dey is a mob bunchin' up back yander in de willers by de crick. Dey ah on de way a-pretendin' to be aftah youh prisonah, but dey aim to kill you, Marse Jules."

"To kill me?" asked the astonished guard.

"Yes, sah. Hit's Hum Gilton an' his crowd. Dey done hatched up a 'spiracy to shoot you down if you try to protect Leech, an' dey knows you all will do de protectin' all right."

"But look here, Judy, how do you know such a plan is to be tried to-night?"

"Virgil Hawley told me. He heered 'em a-hatchin' hit all up down on de Coon. He come ovah to tell my li'l' missy. She wasn't to home so I come instid. Believe me, hit's true as Gawspel."

Jules' eyes were suddenly dimmed and misty as he said: "Thank you, Judy. This is a whole lot to do for a — a nobody like me. I've been suffering terribly of late, and yesterday I would have thanked you to leave me to Gilton and his mob, but somehow now I want to live. To-night the hurt is almost healed. Tell Brilla,— for I know she has had much to do with your coming here,—that I have no words in which to thank her. But you cannot remain—you might be injured."

"What? Not stay?" asked the woman fiercely. "Not stay an' see de mix-up aftah ridin' my gizzards out. Co'se I'se gwine to stay right hyah, an' dey ain't nobuddy a-goin' to git hurt but de enemy. . . . Sh-h. Listen. I can hyah dem horses sloshin' through de crick right dis blessed minnit. Dey am a-comin' foh shore an' dey mean bus'ness. One lone man ain't gwine to stan' much show ag'in a pack of yelpin' blood-thirsty hyenas. Now, I'se gwine to be right hyah in de dawк alongside o' dis hyah jail an' I'll be in on de home stretch."

Across the village square the mob appeared, riding two by two. The moon, half emerging from a bank of dun clouds, showed the men first

in double rank, then trailing like a slimy serpent one by one, moving at last in an unbroken wedge to the prison entrance. Their faces were hidden by black masks, their coats turned inside out. Each horse moved under a complete canopied disguise of tow sacks.

Nearer and nearer drew the body of men. At length a stop was made before the building, and Jules Marzelle called out: "Stop where you are. In the name of the sheriff of the county, say what business brings you here at this hour?"

There was not a break in his voice — it rang clear and steady. The colored auditor, leaning silently against the dark side of the building, grinned a satisfied approval.

"We want Leech, and we want him quick. Understand?" growled one of the mob nearest the jail.

"Acting under my oath as an officer sworn to enforce law and order, I refuse to surrender my prisoner," Jules coolly retorted.

"We're going to git Leech ef we have to burn the hull durn shack an' take him out over yore body," cried the slim rider of a big mule. Jules recognized the speaker at once, despite his close and careful disguise.

"Oh, ho, that's you, is it, Gilton? I was told to expect you. I suspect it will surprise you a bit, but the name of every coward in your bunch is known to more than one in the hills to-night.

Now all I've got to say is: Take Leech if you can. We've heard all about the scheme hatched up down on the Coon in nightly meetings. You don't give a hoot whether my poor irresponsible prisoner lives or dies. You want me for some unfathomable reason, but you don't dare to be open and above board. You must follow up the policy of the assassin and try to hide behind a crazy man."

At Marzelle's last words several of the riders backed away from the prison. There was a pause of some duration when the slim rider called out:

"We didn't come here to listen to any of your preachin'. Give us that key."

"I shall do no such thing," answered Jules. Decisiveness rang in each word.

The hush of night hung over the little village and for a moment the air seemed changed and chilled. The moon, passing from behind the shadow of one somber cloud toward the encircling pall of another, beamed down upon the group of lawless men and upon the advance rider whose rifle was aimed in the direction of Marzelle. Just as the trigger unloosed the messenger of death the guard crouched very low and the bullet struck the iron of the door a fraction above his head.

Before the would-be murderer could fire the second time Judy, with blood-curdling yells that aroused half the inmates of the village, returned

the fire from the old rifle of Captain Henry Clay Barker.

Her aim was true and telling in its effect. The weapon of the rider dropped to the ground. Reeling from side to side the victim of Judy's bullet fell low upon his horse's neck. One of his companions grabbed the bridle rein, a whispered command was given, then the mob turned about; and soon naught but a whirling cloud of dust marked their flight as the half-dressed villagers came running from every direction toward the scene of the trouble.

Under cover of the confusion Judy Harrison hurriedly drew away and made her way carefully to a secluded spot on the bank of the creek, where she remained until the break of day.

Jules Marzelle, "like some young cypress, tall and dark and straight," continued to keep watch from the shadow of the prison.

News spreads rapidly throughout the hills. The next morning found Barkersville with determined citizens who were aroused to action by the bold attempt to murder one of their most highly esteemed neighbors.

A trail of blood leading from the prison to the ford on the creek gave ample proof that the bullet from Judy's gun had left telling imprint upon the anatomy of some coward.

While knots of angry citizens gathered about, the sheriff,—tired, hungry, and wrathful,—rode in. The riot call that had caused him to take

such a long, hard ride had been trumped up for the occasion. He found upon his arrival at Willows Creek that there had been no trouble nor hint of trouble in the community. The rage and the indignation of the wiry little man over the lawless conspiracy and the outrage at the jail during his absence knew no bounds.

Robert Barton, fearing that some wild report might have reached the Little Mother, sought Jules and advised him to go home at once. Judy, however, had asked the Captain to ride over early to the Hudson home. Henry Clay Barker, fearing that the baffled mob might have given vent to their malice by harming Mrs. Marzelle in some way, had gone at once to assure himself of her safety.

As Jules started for home the Judge called to him:

"I found this on my desk a few moments ago," he said. "It is addressed to you in my care."

Marzelle had on several occasions received business communication in this fashion, and therefore thought nothing strange of it. He merely thanked Judge Barton for the courtesy and proceeded upon his way, eager to reach his mother.

When he opened the note its contents made him sick. He was hot and cold by turns, and his head spun like a dizzy top as he read again the words:

"If this reaches you, watch the haunted cabin on the creek below Barker's. It is where the school-teacher spends all of her

time now. She was there last night, and so was the stranger. Don't take our word for it. Keep your eyes open."

There was a breath of grief mingled with anger, and his clenched fist struck the letter against the pommel of his saddle as he said: "Who — who in Heaven's name has penned such a lie of Brilla Barker? If I find him I'll lay his execrable head lower than the dust."

He determined to see Brilla that evening, to show her the insulting charge; then he would put aside all other duties in a hunt for the offender.

But somehow the fairness of the morning seemed sullied, his body old and tired. He closed his eyes as he rode. When he opened them the warring tide of feeling was there, and again "the rainbow gleams of his youthful dreams were things of the long ago."

## CHAPTER XXIII

AS soon as Captain Barker was out of sight on his way to Mrs. Marzelle's Judy took a warm breakfast to the two night watchers. Then Brilla and Pike Hamilton heard from her a detailed account of the shooting and of the wild doings of the night. To Brilla the news brought a feeling of great relief. She had been numb with the unspoken terror that the wild riders of the night might be a posse in search of her father, who was apparently growing weaker.

"I feel we are making a grave mistake in not having a physician, Miss Brilla," Hamilton said. "Your father will die if he does not have medical aid. We are treating him wholly in the dark."

"Yes — yes, you are right," sobbed Brilla. "The doctah shall come to-morrow."

Once during the afternoon the light of reason seemed to appear in the sick man's eyes,— eyes that resting on the face of the girl bent over him lit up with some unspoken request. His lips moved, framing the name of Brilla's dead mother; then, as if the effort wearied him, his tired eyes closed and once more the heavy stupor gripped him.



Thus the hours dragged wearily. Brilla, discouraged, seemed frozen, cowed, and utterly beaten, knowing not which way to turn. Hamilton, watching her, suffered with her. Steadfastly she refused to leave her father's bedside, telling Judy to make any excuse she wished for her absence from her Uncle's home.

The evening shadows were beginning to deepen in the glen. Hamilton, stricken by the girl's pallor, prevailed upon her to walk to the creek for a pitcher of fresh water, and urged her to remain for a time out of doors. Brilla answered listlessly. Slowly she made her way to the tiny spring that welled up from the roots of an old gnarled tree. The solitude of the woods was broken by reedlike echoes and the low piping of birds as they sought their night's shelter, but to the girl these sounds breathed mournfulness and desolation. After filling the pitcher, she bathed her face in the refreshing waters of the stream, then turned toward the cabin. As she walked she prayed, "Dear God, help me." Startled by a rustling, she paused and looked about. Jules Marzelle, like a graven image, stood not ten feet away, silently regarding her.

"Jules," she said, "how you frightened me!"

"I am sorry if I have struck a discordant note in such a pleasant situation."

"I do not understand," she replied.

He handed her the anonymous communication. As she read it the color flooded her cheeks, mount-

ing to the very roots of her rippling hair. Then dying out, it left her blanched and shivering.

"And you have believed to the extent of spying upon me?"

"Oh, no; I sought you first at your home. I came here to prove to myself that the charge was a lie."

"And now you think —"

"I know not what to think. I find you here."

"And this from you, Jules, who have known me all my life,— you who have professed to love me. Come —" Helpless she stood lost in thought a moment, her violet eyes turned afar off toward a distant gap in the hills. "Come — I will show you why I am here."

He followed her quietly, the blood crimsoning his face in a mantle of shame, for something in the innocent, straightforward way in which she had met his look of withering scorn had made him fearful. What had he done?

Brilla Barker began to speak as soon as she had crossed the threshold. "Mr. Hamilton, it has become necessary for my neighbors to know why I am present. Theah is the reason, suh, lying over theah on the cot. That is my fathah, whom Mr. Hamilton found in this cabin, alone and desperately ill, as you see him now. Discovering from his delirious ramblings that he was my fathah, Mr. Hamilton came for me. We have made him as comfortable as possible and kept his presence hidden because of

Uncle Bawkah's fierce angah and the fact that he has been a fugitive from justice. I told my Uncle a lie to excuse my absence and stayed last night. That is why I have been suspected of wrong, foh no good in the world ever resulted from a hideous lie. I did not want to burden you, Jules, with additional worry, or I should have sent for you. Now—I am going at once to break the news to Uncle Henry Clay and send Judy foh Doctah Matthis."

Jules stood rooted to the spot, speechless,—overcome by the thought of the savage impulse that had led him to doubt such pure affection, such guileless truth.

"I plead for pity, Brilla. I've been through hell lately, and I am myself no longer. This terrible wrong to you will haunt me forever. Give me your forgiveness, your compassion. Hamilton, she won't refuse you. Ask her to be merciful—to forgive this wrong."

Brilla caught the outstretched hand of her old schoolmate.

"Don't reproach yourself so, Jules. I foh-give you. Sadness and regret have crowded and crushed my own heart until theah is no room foh bitterness to-day. I do fohgive you as I hope those whom he has injured will fohgive my fathah, suh."

"I love you, Brilla dear." Jules Marzelle put his hand to his brow as if to press down an ache.

Brilla turned away as she replied, "You ah mistaken, Jules."

"I know I am not worthy, but please, Brilla, don't doubt the truth: I love you."

The girl's eyes were big and full of trouble and her mouth trembled in its sorrowing sweetness. Her voice was clear as she said:

"You ah mistaken, Jules. Mistaking pity, perhaps, for love. Why, how could theah be love wheah theah is no trust? Excuse me, please—" Her eyes burned into his own until they drooped in remorse before her, and he groaned:

"O God, what a fool,—what a coward I've been!"

"Excuse me. The daughtah of the outcast must now go to tell her proud kinsman of his erring brothah's return."

The slender form of Brilla Barker trembled like a mountain lily in a storm as she stepped out into the deepening dusk,—alone.

Marzelle submitted to Hamilton the letter that had hurt the innocent victim so cruelly, and humbly begged pardon for the moment's doubt that had assailed him.

The two men stood side by side, looking down upon the other man whose impulsive earlier days had created such a tragic hour in the life of the woman they loved.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**L**EE BARKER had been removed from the weird and lonely cabin to the home of his brother. His condition improved somewhat, but Brilla refused to permit her uncle, or any one else, to ask him to give an account of himself until he was stronger. Dr. Matthis abetted her in this decision, and as the invalid remained in a weakened state, the secret of his flight and of his wanderings remained undivulged.

The good doctor from Barkersville had another very sick patient. Humwell Gilton proved to be the man that Judy's bullet had struck. The wound was not necessarily fatal, but in the hope of avoiding detection Gilton had neglected it until a deadly pyæmia had developed.

Judge Barton was alone in his office several days later when a message from Dr. Matthis was received, urging him to come to Gilton's bedside in all haste. Robert Barton, to his astonishment, found that Gilton wished to make a confession.

Summoning the sheriff of the county and a neighbor of Gilton's to act with the doctor as witnesses, Judge Barton wrote the strange recital as it fell from Gilton's dying lips.

These were Gilton's words:

"Twenty-two year ago I war acquainted with Dr. Jules Marzelle an' with Lee Barker, the young brother of Captain Henry Clay an' the pappy of Brilly Barker. I was some older than 'ary one of 'em. Thar war quite a peart band of wild young fellers hyarabouts in them days, an' six of our gang got to counterfeittin' an' to making bad whiskey. I war the leader of the band. We got a lot of good money that we made by passin' off counterfeit. We had a fight one night when we war divvyng up some of the good money, an' George Runnel,—whut lived over on Beaver,—war shot. He died the next day, an' hit war given out that he killed hisself by accident while rabbit huntin'. No one,—outside of three of the band an' Doc Marzelle, who war called in to look after him,—knew how he come to die. Runnel, when he found he war goin' to die, gave the whole story of the counterfeittin' an' the fight to Dr. Marzelle. He asked the Doc not to squeal on the rest of us. After George died the Doctor warned us that he knew, gave us right smart advice, an' begged us to give up the business.

"We paid no 'tention to what he said until after he was drowned an' the revenuers come into the hills. We thought then that Dr. Marzelle had told Gabe Hudson an' his gal an' they set the officers on our track. We took an oath to be avenged ag'in' them an' every one of their blood. The revenuers got so hot on our trail we had to

leave the kentry. It was jest about that time Hallie Marzelle's son was born.

"But before we pulled out we drawed lots to see who war to carry out the work of gittin' even. We put five beans in a bag,—three white ones, one black, an' one red,—an' the one drawin' the black bean war to do the work, the one drawin' the red one war to go along an' see that it war done. I drew the black bean; Lee Barker, the red one. Then I stole the record of the marriage from the desk of Justice Eblen. You kin find hit with some other papers in a tin box in my trunk.

"Lee Barker went with me, but he stayed on the outside an' never did know jest what I war after. He war drinkin' at the time. Tom Hardy war the feller in the squire's office when the couple war married. He war one of the gang, too, an' had to git out when the rest of us did. He went to Texas with me. My brother, who war livin' then, told folks my lungs war failin', an' I had to go away for my health. I war the one that paid Tom Hardy to write the letter back to Boone, the sheriff, a-sayin' the marriage war a fake. The letter war a wicked lie.

"Lee Barker war a pretty decent feller when he war sober, but he come into our gang an' took the oath when drinkin'. He never made any counterfeit money, or passed any thet I ever heard of. The worse act he war guilty of war goin' with me when I stole the record. He left when

we scared him off. I understood he went to Kentucky an' got hold of a piece of land, whar him an' a nigger,—that used to work for the Barker family, named George Harrison,—has been a-raisin' terbacker ever since. He wrote to me every once in awhile, wantin' to come back an' be released of his oath, but I kept him away by writin' lies to him about his folks, an' a-tellin' him thar is a warrant out for him. He held the secret of a rich deposit of lead and zinc hyar some place, an' I kept him away thinkin' I could finally locate the vein myself, an' I did.

“Hit is on the Andrews farm an' will pan out to be a big thing. I swore a lie ag'in' ole man Andrews a-tryin' to send him to the pen so I could git hold of his place. It was me that had one of the boys write the note to Jules about Brilly an' the stranger an' leave hit on the Judge's desk the mornin' after I failed to git him at the jail. The address of Tom Hardy, the man who saw Dr. Jules and Hallie Hudson married, can be found among my papers with letters from him. He never did come back to Taney County.

“For these an' all of my evil deeds I am sorry, an' I ask forgiveness from all those I have injured and hurt. If my life could be spared I would spend all of my days a-tryin' to repair some of the wrongs I committed.

“I have no living kin, so it is my last wish that my property be equally divided between the children of James Andrews, the man I tried to ruin.”



The confession was read over slowly to the suffering man; then it was signed and witnessed.

Twenty-four hours later Humwell Gilton passed out into the Great Beyond.

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## CHAPTER XXV

**T**HE late summer held happy days for Brilla Barker and the invalid. The truant father slept many of the hours away, or went over the scenes of his youth time and again with the now serene Captain or with Judy, who both knew that the tide of life for Lee Barker was slowly ebbing.

The father, in his worshipful pride of his daughter, kept her a constant yet willing comrade. The strain, however, began to tell and Dr. Matthis interfered. He scolded vigorously and ordered Brilla to live in the open air at least several hours of each day.

This gave to Pike Hamilton the opportunity to ramble with the girl on sunny afternoons while her father slept, and they explored near-by glens "where peeped forth the violet pale" and slopes "where spread her breast the mountain rose."

Jules Marzelle was absorbed heart and soul in the campaign, canvassing the district, making speeches here and there, and growing more popular day by day. His election was conceded by every one, and Brilla Barker was very glad.

Despair, which had claimed him for its own, had fled.

But the happiest man in the Bald Knobs, the youngest of heart, was the big-souled lawyer, Bob Barton. Hallie was to become his wife at Thanksgiving. The old chicken ranch upon the Mink, so full of memories for the Little Mother, was to be sold. Already a modern cottage was being erected on the hillside overlooking Barkersville. This was to be Hallie Marzelle's future home. The Judge, living over all the romance of his youth, had chosen a site where he might, as his wife sat with her sewing upon the porch, lean over his office casement and waft her a kiss. For no schoolboy's heart was more full of love than was that of the learned Judge,—“fit to occupy the chair of the Chief Justice, suh.”

Pike Hamilton and Brilla in their wanderings came again to the log cabin on the creek. They looked into the familiar room where the clear sunlight creeping through the broken chinks traced mysterious patterns on the floor. In the corners the shadows were dark, and a lizard scurried across the empty hearth. Brilla shivered, and her voice broke as she said:

“Mr. Hamilton, my deah, good friend, how-evah can I thank you, suh? When I awake in the night and think of this,—this place and of what might have happened to him heah and alone —”

“Forget it all, Miss Brilla. Those sorrowful days are at an end — life's happiness lies before you.”

He stood looking down into the young girl's violet eyes, trying to read a secret there. The look that she returned was steady and unembarrassed.

"Let us sit here in the old doorway once again. I've something to tell you," he said.

Her curved lashes veiled her fine eyes. A long strand of her wonderful hair tossed by a mischievous breeze brushed Hamilton's cheek. He caught it and pressed it to his lips.

"Brilla," he said, "the time has come,—the time when I must tell you what your woman's heart has perhaps already guessed. I care for you more than I can say, Brilla. Tell me, is there any hope for me?"

The beauty and the glory of her womanhood rushed over him. Each of her tender cheeks wore a deepening stain of rose, but she laid an open hand upon his shoulder and looked up at him unafraid.

"My friend, I do not wish to hurt you aftah all you have done foh me and foh my people."

Pike Hamilton's face was constrained as he answered, "Tell me only what is in your heart, dear."

"I do not love you in the way you would have me. Neither can I believe you have learned to love me as love is meant, in such a short time. My ancestry ranks with yours. My environment and my upbringing do not. I have had no mothah's training,—no fatherly care. My

uncle has done the best he could, but I am a daughtah of the hills, suh, neithah fashioned nor intended for youh life of luxury, for youh brilliant friends,—foh an entrance into a world that does not want me. And you — why you could nevah belong heah. You would tire of the ridges; Nature has made no niche out heah foh you, suh. The yeahs would become a dreary waste, you would fossilize and in time learn to hate us all, especially the magnet that drew you heah. You ah noble, kind, and good. Ouhs has been a great friendship, but — oh, I am sorry — it cannot be.—Fohgive me, if it hurts.”

She buried her face in his sleeve, crying softly. Hamilton comforted her as best he could and did not misunderstand, did not misinterpret. She trusted him and looked to him, but as to a friend, — a very dear friend. He stroked her hair and kissed it gently — as if she had been a child.

“It’s all right now, dear. We are the best of friends. But may I not ask — there is another?”

“I do not know, suh,” she answered quickly. “Sometimes I think theah is; and in the face of how my fathah has wronged him I feel that all the love and the devotion I am capable of could not atone foh the wrong. Then comes the sting of the broken trust, the faith lost, if only for a moment, and it makes me almost hate him, suh.”

In the flash of the old spirit it was hard for

her to keep her words calm, and before she could continue Hamilton said:

"Then this must be good-by, and I must leave you. . . . I shall go to make up for the careless, idle years. Oh, yes,—I've been an idler,—a failure,—but you have given me higher ideals and I shall try to make a splendid thing of life."

"But you will not grow away from us forever?"

"I shall not. Who may say when we shall meet again. But as long as the same sunlight gladdens city and ridge, while the same moonlight silvers metropolis and hill, I shall remember the woman whose friendship has made life finer and sweeter for me,—the woman who has given me strength to do my duty. . . . I shall carry away with me a deeper respect for mankind, a holier reverence for women. I have learned much here in your hills, child."

Tears were trembling on Brilla's long lashes and dropping unrestrained upon the curve of her rounded cheek.

"Then I am going to tell you good-by dear friend,—in this very spot where you stood by me when all the world seemed dark and fearful. Good-by; and God keep you dearer than you may be."

There was tense silence for a moment, then Hamilton held out his hand and said:

"Come, Brilla of the Bald Knobs, your daddy will be missing you."

Slowly they made their way homeward. Brilla tried to talk naturally, but her face was wistful during the intervals of silence, and Hamilton was serious and thoughtful.

As they came in sight of the Barker homestead the air seemed to be alive with unusual bustle and excitement. Judith, running out to meet them, the bandanna handkerchief awry upon her black head, had a happy lilt in her voice as she said:

"Glory Hallelugah, li'l' missy. My Gawge done come back jes' laik you all say he would. He follered Marse Lee back hyar from Kaintuck an' we all is re'nited an' rejoicin'. Everybuddy's happy now an'—"

She stopped short; she did not read happiness in Hamilton's face.

Brilla answered: "I am evah so glad, Judy. You deserve to be happy."

"And so am I glad, Judy,—glad to see you rejoicing before I leave. We have been good friends, have we not?"

"'Deed we have, Marse Pike, if I has taken de liberty o' playin' a few pranks 'bout de pies. But sho'ly you all ain't goin' away?" she asked in a tone of regret.

Hamilton looked off to where the hillside lay dozing in the glow of the afternoon sun, and over beyond to the river, sleepy and emerald blue and unfretted. He answered quietly:

"Yes, Judy, I must be leaving now in a day or two. It will be just as well to say good-by to

you all now. I have the Marzelles, Judge Barton, and other friends to see to-morrow."

Silently they made their way into the house, and Hamilton stopped a moment to give the terrier a farewell pat. He was in a deep introspective mood. It was as if some strange light illumined his soul, showing him all his past unworthiness. A restless desire to be doing something worth while gripped him. He could hardly bring himself to believe that the days that had been so full of happiness were so soon to lie behind him.

When Captain Barker said good-by to Hamilton he controlled every outward trace of emotion and calmly wished his young friend Godspeed. But long after the footsteps of the departing guest had died away the veteran, with his face buried in his hands, sat grave and silent.

The eyes of Lee Barker were dim and misty. He clung to the parting hand of the one who had snatched him from Death long enough to permit him to look upon the faces of those he loved, but words failed to come.

Brilla walked down the flinty road with Hamilton. They soon paused to shake hands gently. Then she stood alone, watching him as he went away. At the top of the ridge he turned, as once before, to the compelling influence of her violet eyes. She waved her hand; he lifted his hat, then was soon lost to sight beyond the slope of the hill.



## CHAPTER XXVI

**O**CTOBER had gathered with lavish hand and was prodigally spilling over the ridges all the reds, umbers, and browns of Nature's paint shop. As the summer waned the feeble strength of Lee Barker had failed altogether, and it was now a fortnight since he had been laid to rest beside the grave of his young wife in the family burial plot upon the hillside. It was in the evening,—the gray of the twilight hour,—when his tired, harassed spirit had given up the fight, answering the summons to drift no longer. The chain that had linked his weary soul to regret had been suddenly rent asunder.

The Captain, looking down upon the quiet face of the one who had given him so many bitter yesterdays, spoke no outward word of grief, but he turned to Judge Barton, with eyes bedimmed, and whispered in an undertone:

"No further seek his merits to disclose  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
The bosom of his Father and his God."

The burial, as a funeral is called in the ridges, was well attended. Men and women came from far and near, remembering only the kindly side

of a once glad-hearted youth who had stepped aside upon the tangled pathway. At the request of the Captain and his niece the services were simple. Judge Barton read the burial psalms and a prayer.

Jules Marzelle was present. He pulled himself together with an effort as the slight form of Brilla, leaning heavily upon the arm of his mother, entered to look upon the face of the father whom she had found but to lose. Accustomed as they were to curbing emotion and stilling sentiment, strong men turned aside from the deep, quiet grief of the daughter. For several days thereafter a feeling of gloom pervaded the hills.

Sleeping or waking, Jules could see the face of the woman he loved. He could hear her soft voice repeating ever and again the reproach, "Theah can be no love wheah theah is no trust." One afternoon, when the beauty of their world stirred him to memory and to hope, he sought the home of his old playmate. Judy answered his knock.

"Lawsy, Marse Jules, I sho'ly is glad you all come. Dat chile jes' stay up by dem lonesome graves on de hill all of de time. Captain Henry, he's been a-tryin' to git huh to go back to Kaintuck an' visit dem highfalutin' Lee folks, but she jes' won't give in to leave dem graves. Hit ain't nat'ral laik foh any young pusson to act in sech a fashion. Yo' ma done give huh dat ole hick'ry bench from you all's back yawd, an' she had

Gawge to tote hit up yandah to de buryin' groun', an' right yandah she stays till dawk sometimes."

The bench,—the old gnarled bench which his boyish penknife had carved with her name and his! He was impatient now and could not await her return, so he started out to look for her. Everywhere there was a deep, quiet silence. Jules looked fairly into the future as he climbed a narrow uphill trail, realizing how valueless everything would be without her if she turned away from him. He seemed to taste the bitter cup of the silence and the solitude of the years without her, and he hurried on.

He could see her with her head buried upon one arm just as he had seen her once before,—out under the big cherry tree the night of the candy-breaking. With a deep sigh, he turned aside from the path, and as he did so he crunched a bunch of dry leaves and withered ivy under his feet. Brilla looked up, then arose, and a delicate flush crossed her features. Her hands closed tensely upon the back of the rude seat as she faced him.

"Brilla, forgive me," he said. "I had to come back—I had to see you."

There was a glow of her old spirit for a moment, a spark of fire that sharply accentuated the prettiness of the slender girl. She hesitated, then said:

"I had begun to think that what you had seen of me in the last few months had —"

"Don't," he implored her, with outstretched hand. "Don't. I am not fit to speak to you — to look into your eyes. The thought of my cowardice has become a hell. How I wounded you,— you who have had so much to bear! Tell me that your whole faith in me is not shattered — that I have not killed everything between us by my blindness. Brilla,— Brilla,— only give me the opportunity to atone."

He stood before her sick at heart, and his face was white and impassioned as he held out both hands in an earnest, pleading way.

Tears came into the eyes of Brilla Barker as all the anguish, all the pain, of the past few months rushed in a torrent to her lips. He stood before her, a drooping figure of remorse. There was a hunted eagerness in his eyes as he looked at her. She noticed that his face had grown thinner, that an humble, penitent expression had replaced the look of proud strength that had clung about him before the nomination. She knew that he was honorable and high-minded. As he stood there pleading his cause with the woman he loved he saw a wonderful peace in the look that she gave him.

"You ask for the opportunity to atone — to atone. Who should turn a deaf ear to the plea of one trying to undo a wrong. Oh,— if my father lying so quietly asleep had only had his opportunity to atone, instead of going out wrecked and shattered of soul into the darkness, life's

sun for him sinking beneath a cloud." There was a pause; then her mood changed, and she said quietly, "Do you recognize the old seat, Jules?"

"Do I, old playmate? Why, it is enshrined within my memory. There is not a scar upon its bark that I do not worship. Let me see — it was on this arm that the two hearts were entwined. Yes, here they are, plain as day, and we were but sixteen when I cut them there. Do you remember that day, Brilla?"

Did she? A swift rush of color, challenging the scarlet creeper that encircled the dogwood near-by, answered the question as a silent tell-tale, crimsoning her throat and temples. He put his arms about her.

"For the sake of One who planted lasting friendship within our childish bosoms, One who creates love to answer love, say you forgive me. Only say I may have the opportunity —"

She was very quiet. Her lips opened to speak. Softly she answered:

"I give you the opportunity, Jules."

"Then some day love will come, dear?"

"The day love was absent you may count as one. It was the evening —"

"Forget it in forgiveness." He spoke with his lips against her cheek. "Believe me, dear, I have been punished."

There was a long pause. A tear, hot and remorseful, fell against the girl's face from the eyes

of the penitent as he kissed her lips, her brow, and her hair.

"I ask you to be my wife. See, I ask you in the presence of these sacred dead. That kindly sunbeam falling upon both humble mounds,—is it not a benediction, Brilla dear? Is your answer yes?"

Her words were low. She surrendered in a whisper, but the surrendering was sweet.

Hand in hand they left God's Acre upon the hillside and climbed up to the summit of the ridge.

Great soft bolls of clouds were changing color—from pearl to pink—from lavender to emerald—from emerald to old rose,—beribboning the horizon beyond the Knobs in a path of gorgeousness for the sun, which was sinking like a great ruby poppy with heart of powdered gold.

"Oh, I see a deer crossing the valley!" cried Brilla.

"And above is a hawk climbing high and higher as he circles in the air. Both are good omens of the future." He drew her within the shelter of his arms. "What are the lines of Kipling?"

"'The wild hawk to the wind-swept sky,  
The deer to the wholesome wold,  
And the heart of a man to the heart of a maid  
As it was in the days of old.  
The heart of a man to the heart of a maid,  
Light of my tents be fleet—  
Morning waits at the end of the world  
And the world is all at our feet.'"









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